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CLYTÆMNESTRA



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CLYTÆMNESTRA

A TRAGEDY

BY

ARNOLD F. GRAVES

WITH A PREFACE

BY

ROBERT Y. TYRRELL, LITT.D., D.C.L.

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39, PATERNOSTER ROW LONDON

NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1903

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Printed by PONSONBY & GIBBS, Dublin University Press.

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P R E F A C E

WHEN my friend Mr. Arnold Graves asked me to read the manuscript of *Clytæmnestra* and told me the nature of the task he had undertaken, I confess that I thought he had largely over-estimated his powers ; but upon reading his work I was so much struck with its merits that I urged him to publish. For some time he hesitated, as he had designed his work for the stage and not for publication ; but after consideration he resolved to act on my advice, on condition that I should write a Preface. As I make it a practice not to write unless I believe I have something somewhat new to say (I mean something that I do not know to have been often said before), I at first refused ; but finding that my refusal would have prevented the publication of *Clytæmnestra* I consented with some reluctance.

And now, after this apology for my appearance

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on this stage, let me play the part of prologue and introduce *Clytæmnestra*.

In doing so, it is right at the very outset to say that *Clytæmnestra* is not a Greek play in English, like *Atalanta in Calydon*, but a Greek story treated from the standpoint of the modern dramatist. In selecting his theme Mr. Graves has chosen, perhaps, the one subject in Greek tragic literature which lends itself to such treatment—the Orestea—a story dealing with emotions, passions and situations common to all time, and appealing not only to mature scholars and lovers of poetry but to men young and old, who are interested in dramatic literature and the analysis of human nature. I do not propose to deal at length with the legend here. Those who desire a fuller acquaintance with the subject should consult Professor Jebb's admirable Introduction to the *Electra* of Sophocles. For the purpose in hand it will suffice if I give an outline of the story as told with endless variations by Homer, Stasinus, Pindar, Stesichorus, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides.

Agamemnon King of Argos led the Greeks against Troy to recover Helen, the wife of his brother Menelaus, who had been carried off by Paris, son of Priam King of Troy. Artemis, enraged at a slight put upon her by Agamemnon, held the Greek fleet becalmed at Aulis until at the bidding of Calchas the Seer Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia; thereby appeasing the angry goddess and losing his wife's love. For ten years he remained away from his home waging war against Troy; while Clytæmnestra ruled at Argos, watched over by a minstrel in whose charge Agamemnon had placed her. In spite of the warnings of Hermes, the lonely wife, who had learned to hate her husband, soon fell a victim to the seductive arts of Ægisthus, an outlawed cousin of Agamemnon.

Upon the fall of Troy Agamemnon at the head of the Greek fleet set sail for Argos, bringing with him Cassandra, daughter of Priam King of Troy, part of the spoils of war which had fallen to his lot. But a great storm arose and scattered the Greek fleet; and Agamemnon's ship

arrived alone. News of the fall of Troy, however, had reached his home before him, and Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus had time to prepare their plans; so that when the king appeared with a mere handful of followers he fell into the trap laid for him and was murdered by his wife and her lover. Orestes, his only son, escaped and took refuge with kinsmen at Phocis; while Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus seized the throne of Agamemnon.

Electra, the sister of Orestes, remained at Argos, hoping for her brother's return in due time to avenge their father's murder, and suffering all manner of persecutions from her mother for her loyalty to her father. On reaching man's estate Orestes consulted the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and was commanded by the god under the direst penalties to slay his mother. Obedient to this behest, he set out for Argos accompanied by his companion Pylades. Arrived there, and in order to throw Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus off their guard, Orestes announced his own death. On hearing the news, Ægisthus rejoiced openly;

Clytæmnestra pretended to grieve, but was glad at heart; while Electra gave way to despair, which was quickly succeeded by a lively joy when Orestes secretly revealed himself to her and told his mission. She in her turn disclosed to him the persecutions she had suffered, and urged him on to vengeance. Pylades reminds him of the order of the god, and the long delayed retribution falls upon the murderers of Agamemnon, who are slain by the hands of his son.

I need not go into the last scene of the tragedy, where Orestes is pursued by the Erinyes for the murder of his mother and is finally justified by Apollo and Athené in person.

Mr. Graves follows Sophocles and closes his story with the death of Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus. In this he has, in my opinion, acted wisely, as the motive of the *Eumenides* would have been wholly foreign to an English audience; while, from a dramatic point of view, it would have been an anticlimax.

And now it is high time that I should say

something as to the manner in which Mr. Graves treats his subject. I have already pointed to the fact that he deals with the story from the standpoint of the modern dramatist. By this I do not mean to suggest that he has followed the example of Voltaire, Alfieri, or Thompson, and made his characters modern, complex, neurotic, hysterical. On the contrary, he has kept them simple, strong, restrained, archaic.

It is his general treatment of the subject which is modern. The old Greek tragedy was to a large degree religious (not unlike in its conception to our early English miracle plays); in it, religious and moral duties were inculcated, and the *dénouement* was brought about by the gods, who often appeared in person at the critical moment to punish the guilty or reward the innocent. In Mr. Graves' work, on the other hand, the religious interest is subordinated to the human; the gods do not tread the stage; and the chorus, with its religious and moral reflections characteristic of the ideal spectator, is omitted. As a result of these changes, the action is so much quickened

that, without undue compression, the Homeric story is told in one five-act play.

Owing to the arrangements of the stage, quite apart from other considerations, such a feat would have been impossible in a Greek tragedy. With the elementary scenic appliances at command each dramatic representation was practically confined to one scene, and therefore to one time and one place. In consequence of these limitations the Greek tragedians in dealing with the *Orestea* could only deal with one part of the story at a time, and that had to be made complete in itself. The opening scene of necessity explained the situation; and all the scenes worked up to the particular catastrophe with which the tragedy ended. It was an organized whole, able to stand alone. *Æschylus* wrote three tragedies on this one story; *Euripides*, two; *Sophocles* dealt with part of it in one. On a careful study it will be seen that, according to the particular episodes chosen in each of these tragedies, the action for the time being centres round different characters. Hence it is that the plays written upon it bear so many

different names—the *Agamemnon*, the *Electra*, the *Orestes*. But, when it is regarded in its entirety, it will be seen that Clytæmnestra, and not Agamemnon or Electra, or even Orestes, is the central figure round whom the story revolves. She is the curse upon the house of Atreus; and it is her falseness, her revenge, her retribution, which form the mainsprings of the action of the drama. For these reasons I think Mr. Graves is right in giving her name to his tragedy.

In dealing with the subject as a dramatic whole other changes are necessary besides a mere alteration of name; from the very commencement, the play must lead up to the final catastrophe; while for dramatic purposes fresh situations have to be created, so as to give the leading characters their proper predominance throughout. Thus, for example, Orestes, who next to Clytæmnestra is the leading character in the story, has no part in the *Agamemnon*; while Clytæmnestra has only a subordinate part in the *Electra* and the *Choëphori*.

If the subject had been historical, or even if the legend had been told without variations, Mr.

Graves' hands would have been tied. But, as the Homeric story differs from that told by Pindar, Stesichorus, and Hesiod, and as each of the great tragedians introduces fresh matter, and tells the tale to suit his own main purpose, Mr. Graves has much justification for following the example set by Voltaire, Alfieri, and Thompson, and introducing matter not found in the classics ; and, indeed, he has availed himself of this privilege to such an extent, that his presentation of the legend cannot be regarded as even an adaptation of any of the plays upon which it is founded.

The whole of the first Act, in which he presents Orestes as the loving son of his mother and appalled at the revelation of her guilt, is new. So is the first half of the second Act ; the third, until the murder-scene is reached ; and the whole of the fourth : while the fifth deals with the same subject-matter as the *Electra* and the *Choëphori*, but with complete originality.

In addition to new scenes, Mr. Graves creates new characters, such as Lysicles a supporter of

Ægisthus, and Meleander the bard, in whose charge Clytæmnestra was placed by Agamemnon. New, also, in mode of treatment are the Pythia, Pleisthenes the son of Ægisthus, and Hermione beloved by Orestes ; while acting, doubtless, on a hint in the *Choëphori* he develops the nurse into a comedy part, which helps to lighten the gloom when it is darkest.

The principal departures from the story, as told by the Greek dramatists, are : (1) the substitution of human motives and human agency for divine ; (2) the presentation of Orestes as a youth, instead of a child, at the date of his father's murder ; (3) the omission of the meeting between Orestes and Electra at his father's tomb, with the episode of the lock of hair which, to an English audience, would, perhaps, carry ludicrous suggestions ; (4) the putting into the mouth of Orestes the story of the chariot-race.

Finally, the ending differs widely both from the *Choëphori* and from the *Electra*. Mr. Graves, following Alfieri, makes Orestes kill his mother by accident. From a literary point of view, I

think he errs. But it must be urged in defence of his point of view, that an English audience would not tolerate intentional matricide at the order of a pagan god.

Before making my bow, I should like to say a few words about the execution. The play does not hang; for my own part, I read it through without putting it down. The lines are in terse idiomatic English, easy to deliver and to understand—a matter of much importance for stage purposes, which Mr. Graves has ever in his eye. His speeches are cut down as much as possible, so as not to delay the action; but here and there, when the situation demands it, he has let himself go with great effect. His claims to be considered a dramatic poet must, I think, rest chiefly upon the following passages:—(1) the scene between Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus (Act I., p. 8); (2) the reception of Agamemnon (Act II., p. 42); (3) Cassandra's lines on taking Hecuba's crown (Act III., p. 54); Agamemnon's vision (Act III., p. 54); the murder of Agamemnon, described by Cassandra (Act III., p. 72); the two hymns to

Apollo (Act IV., pp. 79-83); the Seer's speech (Act V., p. 99); Orestes' description of the chariot race (Act V., p. 107); the scene between Orestes and Clytæmnestra (Act V., p. 109).

I will not attempt to foist my opinion of Mr. Graves' work upon the public; but I may be permitted to say that, if I had thought his treatment unworthy of his subject, I should not have advised him to publish. I can only hope that my long friendship with the author has not misled my judgment as to the merits of his work.

ROBERT Y. TYRRELL

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

January, 1903

CHARACTERS

ORESTES . . .	Son of Agamemnon
AGAMEMNON . . .	King of all Argos, and Lord of the Isles
ÆGISTHUS . . .	A cousin of the King—in love with Clytæmnestra
PYLADES . . .	Companion of Orestes
LYSICLES } CLEOPHON }	Friends of Ægisthus
MELEANDER . . .	A Bard—Orestes' tutor
ARCAS . . .	A supporter of Agamemnon
PLEISTHENES . . .	Ægisthus' son
TIRESIAS . . .	A Seer.
WATCHMAN	
HERALD	
ENVOYS	
SOLDIERS	
SLAVES	
CLYTÆMNESTRA	Agamemnon's Queen
ELECTRA } CHRYSOthemis }	Her daughters
CASSANDRA . . .	A Trojan Princess
HERMIONE . . .	Betrothed to Orestes
GORG0 . . .	A slave—Orestes' foster-mother
PRIESTESS OF APOLLO	
FEMALE SLAVES	

SCENES

ACT I

The Courtyard of the Palace at Argos

ACT II

The same

ACT III

The great Hall of the Palace at Argos

ACT IV

The interior of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi

ACT V

The same as Act I

CLYTÆMNESTRA

ACT I

SCENE.—*The Courtyard at the palace of King Agamemnon at Argos—the palace on one side, the mountains and sea visible in the distance on the other side.*

[GORGIO and MELEANDER are discovered talking confidentially.]

MEL. If this be true, then Clytæmnestra's false.

GOR. False as a tradesman's weights.

MEL. I am destroyed.

GOR. How so?

MEL. When Agamemnon sailed for Troy
He left her in my charge. Who would have thought
She'd barter Agamemnon for Ægisthus—
A lion for a hound?

GOR. Why not? Why not?
Lions are noble beasts, but lap-dogs please
The ladies better.

MEL. The Princess.

GOR. [*Starts.*] I must be gone. If I am seen
I'll suffer.

ELEC. [*Observing her.*] Did I not bid you fetch
Orestes?

GOR. I'm searching high and low.

[*Looks about her.*

ELEC. Yes, with your tongue.

Go, use your eyes.

[*Exit GORGO hurriedly.*

MEL. Has anybody hurt you?

ELEC. Yes.

MEL. Where?

ELEC. [*Putting her hand to her heart.*] Here.

MEL. She's wounded to the heart.

ELEC. Yes, to the heart.

But it was not a blade that wounded me.

I would it were, for dagger-pricks may heal.

MEL. What do you mean?

ELEC. Nay, do not ask. I'd rather
Walk in the streets unveiled than speak my
thoughts.

MEL. There is no need. The Queen—

ELEC. Hush ! not so loud !
'Tis ten years since the King set sail for Troy—
What may not be forgot in such a time ? [*Pauses.*
But how did you discover she was false ?

MEL. Gorgo—

ELEC. [*Angrily.*] What ! *she* spread the scandal ?
Ah !

If she had her deserts she'd lose her tongue
For blabbing—slaves should all be dumb. They
stand

Beside our chairs, and prick their ears to catch
Our secrets, which they sell. What shall I do ?

MEL. Nothing.

ELEC. And must I sit and watch the Queen,
Her patience wearing out by endless waiting,
Her passion swelling fast beyond control,
Encouraged by her cringing Court's approval,
Until at last believing, like herself,
Her people ripe for change, she throws aside
The veil of decency, and crowns him King ?

MEL. Here comes your sister, fair Chrysothemis,
And sweet Hermione, your brother's choice.

[*Puts his finger to his lips.*

Enter CHRYSOTHEMIS and HERMIONE.

CHR. Ægisthus has given me a span of horses.

HER. And me, a brooch of lapis lazuli.

ELEC. These are not gifts. Ægisthus is no giver :
He barterers gold for favours, gives us bribes
To shut our mouths.

CHR. He gives my mother presents.

ELEC. Patience ! Patience !

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

ORES. [*Showing ELECTRA a sword.*]

See ! what Ægisthus, my kind cousin, gave,
And here, upon the blade, inlaid in gold,
Is traced the story of the golden fleece.

[*Turns to PYLADES.*

To-morrow we will both set sail for Troy,
Where we shall band with all the best of Greece,
Ajax, Achilles, and great Diomede,
And flesh our maiden swords in Trojan blood.

ELEC. [*Raising ORESTES' sword aloft.*]

Why was I not a man to stake my life
In open fight against the foes of Greece ?
Instead of sitting powerless and dumb,

Shutting my eyes to wrongs without redress,
Smiling on shamelessness, and hearing words
A maiden should not hear.

ORES. Nay, what is wrong ?

ELEC. Cannot you guess why *kind* Ægisthus
gives ?

ORES. Because his voyage has been prosperous,

ELEC. No ; but because he would embark upon
A desperate enterprise.

ORES. I'll go with him.

I love a hazard. Tell me what he seeks ?

ELEC. The Queen—

ORES. The Queen ! What does he seek from her ?

ELEC. A jewel which belongs to Agamemnon.

ORES. What do you mean ?

ELEC. He seeks to gain her love.

ORES. He'd best beware, or she will strike him
dead.

ELEC. She knows his mind, and has not raised
her hand.

ORES. I cannot grasp it. Nay ! you do not mean—
That she—I'll not believe it. Meleander !

[*He turns to MELEANDER, who looks away.*

It is impossible, impossible.

Have we not always been her heart's desire?

Are we not ever bedded in her thoughts?

We fill her heart so full, there is no room

For an intruder.

MEL. Love is importunate :

He forces his way in, however full

The chamber of the heart ; and once installed

Upon his throne, the tyrant brooks no rival.

ORES. But if she loved I'd hear it in her voice
And see it in her eyes. I am not blind.

MEL. Nay ! Who can tell ? our hearts are like
the sea :

One day as clear as crystal, and the next

Inscrutable as Erebus. Till now

She would not part with you at any price.

Why does she change her mind, and let you go ?

[Pauses and walks about.]

She wants one witness less to her dishonour.

ORES. *[Half drawing his sword.]* Take care !

MEL. *[Bows his head.]* Too late, my life is
forfeited.

I undertook to guard her honour.

ORES.

Oh !

You do not mean that she—not that ! not that !

My darling mother, my own flesh and blood.

If this be true, 'twere better she were dead.

I'll watch, and, if it's true, I will avenge—

MEL. Nay, not so fast, my son, for, if you strike,

The law will make you justify the deed,

And that would blow about your mother's shame.

[He pauses and reflects.]

We must consult the oracle at once.

There is a ship at Nauplia sails for Delphi

By the next tide.

CHR.

Remember, dear, your promise,

To drive my horses at the games.

MEL.

Hush ! hush !

They come, together.

ORES.

Stand back, let us watch.

[They retire and conceal themselves.]

Enter CLYTÆMNESTRA and ÆGISTHUS. [They speak low.]

ÆG. It cannot be too soon to suit my taste.

CLY. Go softly, or he'll think you push him out.

ÆG. But not too slow ; for love, when at its height,
Brooks not delay, or melts like summer snow.

CLY. My heart is torn in two—I want you both ;
Yet I must take my choice between you. I
Am like a wolf deserted by her mate,
Whose whelps are taken from her one by one—

ÆG. And do you love this half-licked cub so
well ?

CLY. I love and hate him both. I love what's
mine

And hate what is my husband's part in him.
He was my faithful copy ; but alas !
Now that my blossom ripens into fruit,
It changes, and becomes his counterpart :
His hair, his limbs, his face, his ringing voice.
And though he scarce remembers him, each day
He broaches some fresh trick that was his father's :
His walk, his laugh, the way he kisses me ;
And in his sleep he mutters like the king.

ÆG. Last night I dreamt a dream—

CLY. [*Impatiently.*] Another dream !

ÆG. Nay, hear me out ; this was no tangled skein
Of flitting fancies, or elusive shapes,

Leaving no footprints in our memories
By which they can be tracked. The forms I saw
Last night seemed flesh and blood ; each deed they
did,
And every word they spoke, was fraught with
purpose.

CLY. Tell me this dream, before it is forgot :
For sometimes, in the hour 'twixt sleep and waking,
Our fancies, freed from earthly trammels, soar
To heights that sober sense could never reach.

ÆG. 'Twill never be forgot ; methinks 'twas sent
To warn us what our love must lead us to.

*[He looks round cautiously, and then
proceeds, in a low voice.]*

I dreamt that you were Queen of Argos, I
your king.

CLY. And Agamemnon ? Where was he ?

ÆG. Returned from Troy ; he rested on his couch,
And called for wine : you filled his goblet full,
And gave it him ; he drained it to the dregs,
Then sank back on his couch, and fell asleep,
Charmed by your soothing voice ; and while he
drowsed

You wrapt a net around his languid limbs,
And seized an axe— [He pauses.

CLY. And then? Go on. What then?

ÆG. We two were King and Queen of Argolis.

CLY. And afterwards?

ÆG. The lad, Orestes, came—
So changed that none would know him; and he
bore

His ashes in an urn: for he was dead—
You wept; but we had words, and drew our swords,
And battled, hand to hand, and foot to foot;
But drop by drop my courage ebbed away.
I strove to raise my war-cry, but my tongue
Was tied; I raised my sword, but could not strike;
For I was frozen stiff with chilling dread,
As he tore off the mask that veiled his face,
And stood before me, Agamemnon's son.

CLY. And did he take your life?

ÆG. Yes, mine, and yours.

CLY. My boy has not the heart to hurt his mother.
But were I certain such would be my fate,
If I should cling to thee, sweet heart, I'd choose
One summer hour before a wintry age.

ÆG. [*After a pause.*] Yet I'd feel easier were he
away.

Ugh ! that dream ! that dream !

CLY. Dreamer, awake !

ÆG. I've tried all day to shake it off ; it haunts.

CLY. Then he shall go. [*She claps her hands.*

Re-enter GORGO.

Seek out Orestes, quick.

Tell him to wait us here till we return.

GOR. [*Looking round.*] I left him standing on this
very spot.

He must have taken wing : [*Looks up.*] or else the
earth

Has oped its monstrous jaws and swallowed him.

[*Exit.*

[CLYTÆMNESTRA and ÆGISTHUS go up.

Enter PLEISTHENES.

PLE. [*To ÆGISTHUS.*] I wish to speak with you.

ÆG. Speak on, my son.

PLE. I'd speak with you in private, if I may.

ÆG. I have no secrets from Her Majesty.

PLE. [*Turning to CLYTÆMNESTRA.*] I hope my frankness will not give offence.

I love your daughter, and would marry her.

CLY. [*Remaining up.*] Certes, he does not beat about the bush.

Well, I will be as blunt. If we agree
About the dowry, you shall be affianced.

Come to my closet, and we'll thrash it out.

PLE. I thank your Majesty, and kiss your hand.

CLY. [*To ÆGISTHUS.*] How well his courtship tallies with our plans :

For we do thus disarm a dangerous foe.

[*Exeunt ÆGISTHUS and CLYTÆMNESTRA.*
Exit PLEISTHENES at opposite side.

Re-enter GORGO.

GOR. A plague upon it ! Why am I so deaf?
Yet if I had the long ears of a hare
I should not understand ; for when they plot
They talk some foreign tongue. I must be off,
To find my boy. He'll give me such a run.

[ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, HERMIONE,
CHRYSOTHEMIS *come down slowly.*

GOR. [*Observing Orestes.*] He's dropped down from the clouds, I do declare.

Ahem! Ahem! May it please your Royal Highness!

The Queen desires you to await her here.

[*ORESTES takes no notice.*

[*Louder.*] The Queen desires you to await her here.

He's nigh as deaf as I, and he a boy.

[*Louder.*] The Queen desires you to await her here.

ORES. I am not deaf.

GOR. Now he's a sword: he thinks To treat his foster-mother like a slave.

ORES. Forgive me, Gorgo. I was in the clouds.

[*GORGOS looks up; then assumes an expression of wonderment.*

When I was but a boy I called you mother;
And now, though I am heir to Argos' throne,
I wish I were, in sooth, my Gorgo's son.

GOR. Why so, my sonnie pet, my honey sweet?

ORES. Because on princes duties oft are set
Beyond their powers. A curse is on our house.
What desp'rate deed shall I be driv'n to do?

GOR. If you were born a slave you might be
driven

To sell the prettiest child to feed the rest,
And bless your stars you'd something you could
sell.

[A voice is heard calling "Gorgo."]

Anon, anon ; there now, cheer up, my son ;
All will come right at last, for you were born
Beneath a lucky star.

[Exit.]

ORES. *[Covers his face with his hands.]*

She's false, she's false. Oh, god ! then who is true ?
I'll never hold my head up while I live.

Are women only true till they are tempted ?

*[He turns alternately to ELECTRA,
PYLADES, and HERMIONE.]*

Ah ! you are true, and you, and Pylades.

My only safety is to moor my soul

To yours, or it will drift upon the rocks.

Oh ! that brute beast ! he must have worked some
charm

To loose her continence : he is not fit to live.

[Draws his sword.]

Why should I wait ?

MEL. The quarrel is the king's ;
And you are but a boy, and might be slain.

ORES. The gods would not allow it.

MEL. Nay ! who knows ?

ORES. I am a match for him without their aid.

MEL. Hush ! Do not play the braggart. 'Twas
a boast

That lost Iphigenia's precious life.

ORES. You'll make a coward of me. [*Turns away.*]

Traitor ! Wretch !

MEL. [*Puts his finger to his lips.* ORESTES
turns and sees the QUEEN and ÆGIS-
THUS.

ORES. May I not even whip him with my tongue?

Re-enter CLYTÆMNESTRA and ÆGISTHUS.

CLY. Come here, my son.

[*ORESTES comes over to her : she puts her
arms around him, and he shrinks away.*

Why do you shrink from me ?

ORES. [*After a moment's hesitation.*] Because
I'm not a baby to be kissed.

CLY. And has he grown a man all in a day ?

ORES. Yes, in an hour. [*Pauses.*] Let me go and fight.

CLY. And so, my soldier boy, now you've a sword,

You long to prove your prowess.

ORES. [*Breaks away from her.*] And avenge
My father's wrongs upon his enemies.

[He draws his sword, and presents the point at ÆGISTHUS, who draws back in alarm. CLYTÆMNESTRA cries out. Then, remembering MELEANDER'S warning, ORESTES drops the point of his sword and laughs awkwardly. CLYTÆMNESTRA and ÆGISTHUS exchange glances.]

CLY. My boy, you should not play with edged tools.

You might have killed him, without meaning it.

ORES. [*Shakes his head.*] What? kill him without meaning it! Impossible!

CLY. And can you bear to leave me unprotected?

ORES. There is no need, for all your subjects love you.

Don't they, Ægisthus?

ÆG. What was that you said ?

ORES. Pylades sails to-day. May I go with him ?

CLY. This very day ! No, no ; it cannot be.

ÆG. The boy is right. Nay, let him go. Farewells,

If long drawn out, give only greater pain.

CLY. What do I care for pain, if he is here ?

[She puts her arms round ORESTES, he draws back.]

ORES. If I remain at home, now I'm a man,
I shall be dubbed a coward. Let me go.

[He breaks loose, she follows him.]

CLY. What means this sudden change ? Speak !
I command.

ORES. *[Hesitates at first, and then speaks rapidly.]*
This is no place to make a man of me.
Where I am fondled like a favourite slave,
And screened from danger like a puling child.
Give me my freedom, and the air of heaven.
Why was I given this sword, if not to use it ?
There ! Let me go, my place is with the king.

[He repulses her and stands beside]
ELECTRA. CLYTÆMNESTRA *joins*
ÆGISTHUS.

CLY. [*Aside.*] He knows. But how did he find out?

[*She looks over and observes ORESTES and ELECTRA whispering.*

Electra !

[*Beckons ELECTRA.*

Come here, my child. I wish to speak with you :
To-day a suitor seeks your hand in marriage.

[*ELECTRA looks at PYLADES : he shakes his head.*

ELEC. Tell me the worst at once. What is his name ?

CLY. Ægisthus' only son—young Pleisthenes.
And I've consented.

ELEC. Princes may not wed
Without the king's consent.

CLY. Till he returns
I am both king and queen.

ELEC. I will not wed
Ægisthus' son without the king's command.

CLY. We'll see who's mistress here. You will
not wed

Without the king's command !

ÆG. [*Laughing.*]

Why, if you wait

Until the king returns, you'll die a maid.

[*Voices from outside* : "Victory, AGAMEMNON."

CLY. What does this riot mean? Go, bid these churls

Show more respect to me their Sovereign Queen.

[ÆGISTHUS *goes up and returns hastily*.

ÆG. A crowd of citizens, with swords and spears!
It is a rising. Ho! there! Guards! to your posts!

Enter WATCHMAN.

WATCH. The beacon! The beacon!

ÆG. The man is going mad.

WATCH. The beacon is ablaze.

ÆG. What does he mean?

WATCH. The beacon on Arachnæ's crest;—the signal

That Troy has fallen, and the king returns.

CLY. [*To* ÆGISTHUS.] 'Tis false! Some cunning trick to catch the crowd,
And work our overthrow. [*Aloud.*] Go! some of you

And see if he speaks true.

[*All rush out except* ORESTES, ÆGISTHUS.

ORES. So I may stay at home. I am too late.

[Exit dejected.

CLV. He sacrificed my child to speed his going.
What can I do to stay his swift return?

ÆG. We'll sacrifice—

CLY. A fig for sacrifice !
We're masters of our fate, say what they will.

ÆG. And ours are linked together.

[Takes her hand.

CLY. Yes ; together
We'll stand or fall.

ÆG. Why should we stand or fall
When we can fly?

CLY. By Zeus, I will not fly.
We should be hunted by the whole of Greece,
And caught, and carried back again in triumph,
The laughing-stock of all this rabble rout.

ÆG. How then could we withstand the victor
King,
With all the Argive forces at his back ?

CLY. We too will join our forces *at his back*.

ÆG. Ah !

Re-enter ORESTES and the rest, shouting and waving their swords.

ELEC. The watchman lied not. Arachnæon's height

Is all ablaze. The ten years' war is past—
And Agamemnon on his homeward way.

CLY. [*Feigning to be overjoyed at the news.*]
The war is o'er, our tale of trouble ended.
No longer shall our sons be forced to fight,
Or fathers sacrifice their daughters' lives
For fav'ring breezes. Peace is now assured.
Let those who can, forget their miseries ;
And may the thought be balm to hearts bereaved
That we have conquered in this weary fight ;
And that our sons return to Argolis—[*pauses*]
Such as are still alive, and are not wed
To Trojan dames—

[*There is a dead silence for several seconds.*
Why are you silent? Where are now your cheers?
ORES. [*Waves his sword.*] Victory ! Agamemnon !
[*Cheers.*

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE.—*The exterior front view of the Royal Palace at Argos. The city, the mountains, and the sea visible in the distance. Workmen are engaged putting the finishing touches to the decorations in honour of the public entry of AGAMEMNON.*

FIRST CITIZEN. This is a great day for Argos.

SECOND CITIZEN. Yes ; but all the honour and glory belong to our king.

THIRD CITIZEN. He is the greatest soldier of the age.

SEC. C. He's as beautiful as Apollo.

THIRD C. He has a voice as loud as thunder.

FIRST C. And he can run faster than a deer.

SEC. C. And now the war is over, there'll be work for everyone in Argos.

Enter LYSICLES.

LYS. Why are you not working, idle knaves ?

FIRST C. The day is hot.

LYS. Well! Sweat!

SEC. C. We are not slaves.

LYS. I might have guessed that.

THIRD C. How so?

LYS. You are evidently accustomed to be waited upon. [*Bows.*]

FIRST C. You belong to the Court. Eh, mister?

LYS. What if I do?

FIRST C. Is it true the king is going to rebuild the city?

LYS. Like enough—

SEC. C. Did you hear that all taxes are to be abolished?

LYS. And where's the money coming from to build the city?

THIRD C. What? Will he build it with our money?

LYS. What else?

FIRST C. It's very well as it is.

SEC. AND THIRD C. Aye, aye; it couldn't be improved upon.

FIRST C. We'll have peace anyhow.

LYS. Peace! [*Laughs.*]

SEC. C. Why do you laugh?

LYS. Ha, ha! Peace, and Agamemnon king!

FIRST C. Well?

LYS. He's never happy except when he's fighting.

FIRST C. Dear! dear!

SEC. C. No more war for me. I've lost three sons in the war, and have but one left to bury me—

LYS. What! Are you not content with glory?

THIRD CIT. Glory doesn't fill your belly. I've not had a full meal for a twelvemonth. Glory be damned, say I.

LYS. You're not a farmer.

THIRD C. Down with the farmers, and war prices!

FIRST AND SEC. C. So say we all.

THIRD C. Faith! if the gentleman is right, it would have served our purpose better if the king had been soundly drubbed, for then he'd a' lost his stomach for fighting, and we'd a' had our bellies full.

LYS. 'Twould have only made him worse.
He'd never rest under defeat.

FIRST C. Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! and I was always taught to take a beating kindly. What is he made of ?

SEC. C. [*In a whisper.*] He can't help himself.

FIRST C. What ! A king, and can't help himself.

SEC C. [*Takes him by the shoulder and shakes him.*] The curse ! Stupid ! Those who rest under a curse can't sit still.

FIRST C. Eh ! but why shouldn't I sit quiet ? I've never heard tell of any curse on our house.

LYS. Yes ; but you serve the king, and must suffer for him.

FIRST C. Is that so ? Well ! I never !

SEC. C. The gentleman is right.

FIRST C. I wouldn't mind so much if the curse only hurt him. But, if what you say is right, when the king is curst, every man Jack of us is curst with him. Eh, mister ?

OMNES. Hear, hear !

THIRD C. This must be looked into.

FIRST C. Let's talk it over in the market-place.

SEC. C. Aye ! let's ! there's wisdom in a multitude.

[*Exeunt.*]

LYS. A good morning's work. I'll go after them
and instil a little more wisdom into the multi-
tude. Capital!

[*Exit laughing.*]

*Enter ORESTES and HERMIONE, followed by
ELECTRA, and PYLADES, MELEANDER and
CHRYSOthemis.*

ORES. The storm is over, and the thirsty sun
Is sucking up the mist that veiled his face,
And soon will smile his welcome on the king.

HER. Ah! how I trembled as the thick walls
shook

Before the gale. How could a ship survive?

CHR. By bending to the blast.

ELEC. I dread far more

This treacherous calm, which lulls us all to sleep.

CHR. You always harp upon that single string.

ORES. Thyestes' son should hate the sons of
Atreus :

ELEC. Yet he pretends to love us, baits his
hooks

With sugared smiles and costly offerings.

CHR. What has he ever done that you should fear?

ELEC. It is because I cannot see the danger
I fear the most.

ORES. 'Tis thus a crafty chief
Lures on his foes.

ELEC. The king must be forewarned.

ORES. What shall we tell him, sister?

ELEC. Everything.

ORES. If he knew all, he'd take her life.

MEL. And mine.

ORES. Then let me take the quarrel on myself.
Say yes; and I will put it past her power
To sin again—The king need never know—

MEL. The skein is too entangled to unwind
Without the help of heaven.

WATCH. [*From the roof.*] A sail!

ELEC. They come!

[Cheers are heard from the distance.]

Let's to the roof, where we can see them land,
And wave a welcome to their hung'ring eyes.

*[They all go out, and presently re-appear
again on the roof, except ORESTES, who
follows them slowly.]*

[*Note.—From this point there are two groups on the stage—one on the roof, the other in the court-yard.*

ORES. Oh, why is it so hard to know the right?
Ought I to tell him all, and leave the rest
To fate? He is the king, and he should judge.
Yet, he is hasty. Would it not be well
To cover up this stain, and so avert
The risk of some rash act we all might rue.

[*Goes up.*

Enter CLYTÆMNESTRA.

[*She does not see ORESTES.*

CLY. My vows were vain: he has escaped the
storm.

Within an hour he will be standing here.

[*She walks up and down, much agitated.*

Shall I go back to Agamemnon's bed,
To which I have been false, and live a lie?
His wife, his plaything, slave; or shall I be
Queen of Mycenæ, ruler of the Isles,
And mistress of the man I love so well? [*Pauses.*
A child might do it while he is asleep.

[*Seeing* ORESTES.]

[*Aside.*] Yes, I must close his mouth. [*Aloud.*]

Come hither, son.

ORES. What do you want with me?

CLY. Why do you shun me?

Or peer at me askance, beneath your brows?

ORES. I cannot tell :—it is unspeakable.

CLY. Some slippery slanderer has been at work.
It is not just that I should be condemned,
And yet denied a chance to clear myself.
Be frank with me : repeat it word for word ;
And if it shame you, turn your face away.

ORES. Ægisthus. [*Pauses.*] Mother ! Must I
speak the rest?

CLY. And what of him?

ORES. [*Hesitating.*] You love him, do you not !

CLY. I am but mortal, and if Cypris wills
That I should love—

ORES. [*Interrupting.*] You are my father's wife,
Sworn to be true.

CLY. And who dares call me false?

ORES. Not I ; but oh ! beware ! for love is swift.
Fly from it, mother, if you would escape

Unsullied. Think what misery must spring
From such a sowing. Think of us, who love
you.

It would break our hearts. [*Kneels.*]

CLY. I do. Be comforted, and hear me swear
By heaven, I will be loyal to the king.

ORES. Send him away.

CLY. [*Raises him.*] Yes, he shall go to-day.

ORES. The sun shines out again.

[*Puts his arm round her.*]

CLY. My own dear heart !

And you will keep my secret. Not a word !

ORES. Upon my honour !

CLY. Seal it with a kiss.

[*He kisses her.*]

ORES. Thank God that danger's past.

CLY. Now, go! and stand

Upon the roof, and tell me when he comes.

ORES. I will ; I will. [*Goes.*] I thought he came
too late ;

[*Turns.*] But he is still in time.

[*Exit, and re-appears presently on the
roof.*]

CLY. [*Looks after him.*] Sweet innocent!
I've gone too far upon the road to turn.
My only safety lies in pressing on—

Enter ÆGISTHUS and PLEISTHENES hastily.

ÆG. [*To PLEISTHENES.*] My horses!

CLY. Go, and henceforth we are strangers.
Or stay, and strike, for me—the victor's prize.

ÆG. What chance have I? Nay, I were mad
indeed

To fight against such odds. [*Cheers are heard
from a distance.*] They'll follow him:

For those deep-chested cheers come from the heart.
Since dawn the shore has swarmed with anxious
crowds,

Silently standing staring out to sea.

But now they have gone mad; the women weep,
The children clap their hands, the maidens laugh,
And join the men in their tumultuous cry—

VOICES. Hail! Agamemnon, hail!

ÆG. I came away
Lest I should be infected by their joy.

CLY. How many ships are with him?

ÆG. Only one.

CLY. Where are the rest?

ÆG. All scattered by the storm.

CLY. But one!

ÆG. It blew a hurricane last night:

Buildings were overturned, and trees torn up.

Truly it must have been Poseidon's work,

And without heavenly aid no mortal man

Could e'er have gained the sheltering shore alive.

We fight against the gods.

CLY. Against the gods!

They have delivered him into our hands.

ÆG. Would they had drowned him!

CLY. O ye gods! but one!

Heaven only helps the man who helps himself,

And not the fool who stands, with folded arms,

Waiting for fruit to fall into his mouth.

If we would grasp the gifts the gods provide

We must use both our hands.

ÆG. What would you do?

CLY. Cut down the tree. To-morrow I'll be
queen,

The first of women, or the last of shades,
The shadowy ghost of Clytæmnestra's greatness.
A heavy stake ;—a life against a life :— [*Pauses.*
Yes, it shall be, for I would rather die
Than render up the throne where I have reigned
So long.

ÆG. And reigned so well. Come, then, to work !
We've prated long enough—where is Orestes ?

CLY. I've stopped his mouth.

ÆG. And is Electra dumb ?

CLY. Leave her to me.

ÆG. See ; there she is. [*Points.*

CLY. [*beckons to Electra.*]

ELEC. [*Coming down slowly.*] I come.

CLY. [*Aside.*] But one ship with him ! We must
strike to-day.

ORES. How swift she sails, although the air is light !
Some god is speeding her toward the shore.

CLY. [*To ELECTRA, as she arranges her dress.*]
How well this dress becomes my pretty one !
He'll scarce believe you are the callow child
He left behind.

[*They remain out of ORESTES' sight and hearing.*

ELEC. I hope *he* has not changed.

CLY. A fruitless wish ; for war is like the plague,
And even those it spares it sears with irons.

ELEC. The scars of war become a soldier well.

CLY. But not the wounds that warp the warrior's
soul—

The fever-stricken falling off like flies,
The wounded writhing in the scorching sun,
The bosom friends abandoned to their fate,
The children sacrificed, the love betrayed.

ELEC. Ah ! how his heart must bleed !

CLY. He does not feel
Compassion mars a soldier ; so he learns
To stifle pity, till at last he grows
As cold, relentless, cruel as his sword.

ELEC. You wrong him, for he loves us—

CLY. Well enough
To sacrifice ; but he will find his wife
No willing victim, ready to be slain
That he may wed Chryseis or Briseis.

ELEC. [*Hotly turning on her heel.*]
I will not listen to your slanderous tales,
Conceived to cloak your treason.

CLY. Insolence !

Go to your chamber, and remain within.

ELEC. You will not let me see the king's return ?

CLY. That is your punishment.

ELEC. No, no, not that !

Beat me with scorpions, but let me see

That which I've longed for, dreamt of, all these
years.

CLY. At last I've found a punishment that hurts.

Go ! [ELECTRA goes out slowly.

CLY. [*To attendant.*] See that a guard is put
upon her door,

And let none see or speak with her to-day.

[*Exit attendant.*

[*A distant cheer from the ship is heard,
followed by a cheer from the shore, in
which those on the roof join, waving
their hands.*

ORES. [*To CLYTÆMNESTRA.*] You heard that
cheer—'twas from my father's ship :

Voices whose very sound we had forgot.

CLY. Forgot ! I hear his voice above them all.

[*She is much moved.*

Enter GORGO.

CLY. Bid Arcas, captain of the guard, attend.

GOR. [*Curtseying.*] May I go out and see the
ships come in ?

CLY. What, you !

GOR. I love a noise, and I've a son
Was at the war. He was a pretty boy,
And I would know if he's alive or dead.

CLY. Yes, you may go.

GOR. God bless your Majesty !
[*Runs off in the wrong direction.*]

CLY. Send Arcas first.

GOR. Well ! I'm a pretty fool !
[*Turns, and walks towards the Palace ; as
she goes out she speaks aside.*]

If he's alive, he'll give me board and lodging,
And I may loll as idle as a lady ;
And if he's dead—I'm saved the funeral.

CLY. [*To one of her attendants.*] See that the
bath is ready for the king,
And fill his beaker full with Samian wine.

ORES. [*Beckoning.*] Mother ! haste ! haste ! the
ship is close in shore.

CLY. [*To ORESTES.*] A moment more, and all
will be prepared

To meet the king! [*Kisses her hand to him; then
turning to ÆGISTHUS.*] Can Cleophon be
trusted?

ÆG. Yes, with your life.

CLY. Then bid him come at once
To garrison the keep, in place of Arcas,
Whom we must shift.

ÆG. There is just time to do it.
I will this instant bring him and his clan.

[*Exit ÆGISTHUS.*]

ORES. [*Growing excited.*] They furl the sail, at
last they touch the shore.

They run the creaking gangway overboard,
Clamber the bulwarks, press across the plank,
And spring ashore, each striving to be first.

[*Cheers.*]

Enter ARCAS; he salutes.

CLY. Take your command, and lead them to the
port,
And line the road, for fear some fanatic

Should set upon the king.

ARC.

'Tis not unlike—

For poverty breeds maggots in the brain.

I'll start at once ; so't please your Majesty.

[He salutes, and goes into palace.]

Re-enter GORGO. [She hurries across the stage.]

CLY. Stop! Bid the virgins from the temple
bring

The costly coverings from the holy ward

To strew upon the road before the king.

GOR. *[Aside.]* Oh dear! I shall be late to see
them land. *[Exit.*

*[A louder cheer and cries of "Agamemnon"
from without.]*

ORES. The king! It is the king. Look! look!
the crown!

How big he bulks: the image of a god!

See! how the sun shines on his shimmering mail.

They carry him ashore upon their shields,

And seat him in his royal chariot.

CLY. [*Who is alternately listening to ORESTES,
and looking after her own arrangements.*]

How slow they are, who should outstrip the wind.
If this miscarries, everything is lost.

*Re-enter ARCAS and followers : they cross the
stage, and exeunt.*

ORES. Zeus ! how they throng ! A happy, happy
crowd
Of wives and husbands, mothers, sisters, sons,
Clasping each other's necks, as if resolved
Never to let them go !

*[Another cheer—a trumpet sounds, and
distant music is heard.]*

They're off, at last.

Enter MAIDENS bearing coverings.

CLY. [*As she arranges them in a line from the
centre of the stage to the palace door.*]
Stand where I place you ! When the king dismounts,
Spread out the purple to the palace door,
And kiss his garment's hem as he goes by.

Re-enter ÆGISTHUS, followed by CLEOPHON and his men at the double. They cross the stage and enter the palace, except ÆGISTHUS, who approaches CLYTÆMNESTRA.

ÆG. I must not linger or I shall be trapped.

CLY. Have you the philtre?

ÆG. [*Handing it to her.*] Yes, here! Take it, quick!

'Twill make him sleep, and then—

CLY. Your dream comes true.

[A trumpet sounds quite close.

ÆG. You can depend on Lysicles until

I come. There! Let me go.

CLY. To-night, at dusk.

[Exit ÆGISTHUS.

Enter COURTIERS, who take their places.

ORES. Mother! they're close at hand! Come, Pylades,

Chrysothemis, Hermione, speed! speed!

[They come down from the roof, and take their places beside the QUEEN.

Enter HERALD.

HER. Make way for the king.

Enter the SOLDIERS OF AGAMEMNON ; they are crowned with garlands ; their wives and children are clinging to them, and they are accompanied by a pushing crowd of Greeks, who cheer and wave their hands. The advance guard enter the palace, leaving their wives and children outside. As the procession files past there is a steady crescendo of cheering from without.

Enter AGAMEMNON seated in a chariot, CASSANDRA beside him. On his entry, those on the stage cheer, until AGAMEMNON puts up his hand, when all are silent on the instant.

MELEANDER.

*Hail ! Agamemnon, champion, captain, king ;
Invincible upholder of the right,
Swifter to strike than hawk upon the wing,
More secret in thy counsels than the night.
The frowns of fortune, through the ages long,
Thou didst endure, thy purpose firm as fate,
Against the hostile gods upstanding strong,
Regardless of their menace and their hate ;
Until, in spite of fickle fortune's blows,
Thou turnest home, triumphant o'er thy foes.

* This ode may be omitted for dramatic purposes.

Captain and pilot, who the helm didst hold,
Through calm and tempest, shoals and rocky
isles,
Steering our ships across the watery wold,
In spite of Dian's wrath, and Cypris' wiles,
Guiding them safely to the smooth sea sands,
Hauling them high, beyond Poseidon's reach,
In sight of Helen and her Trojan bands,
Building a bulwark by the sheltering beach,
And digging deep a trench in double ring,
And crouching like a lion for its spring.

Then swift as fire you flashed upon your foes,
Struck down their leaders, driving them pell-
mell ;
While to the skies a mighty wail arose,
As, like the leaves, the Ilian warriors fell.
Yet as they fell, fresh levies filled their place :
In flocks, like vultures to the fight they fly,
From every quarter of the starry space,
Resolved to rescue Ilium or to die.
It seemed madness to oppose such odds :
Myriads of men—the mightiest of gods.

Rather than turn away in craven fright,
Undaunted Argos met the world in arms.
But brooding fever with its burning blight,
And fatal panic bred by night alarms,
And sword, and spear, and fire, and famine
dread,
And sweltering sun, and winter storm, and rain,
Heaped up your trenches with your festering dead ;
While mutiny made all your councils vain.
And yet the more the hostile gods said nay,
The more resolved were you to gain the day.

At length, compelled by your unswerving soul,
And driven by Hera's importunity,
Back from Zeus' brow the rumbling storm-clouds
roll ;

He nods his head, and thunders :—" Let it be."
Swiftly to earth his envoy Iris flies,
Bearing the message, Agamemnon seeks,
And tells her tale : the king exulting cries,
Then summons to his side his trusty Greeks,
Reveals the news, and, fretting for the fray,
Upon the instant marshals his array.

The word goes round the camp, the trumpets call,
The sick spring from their beds, who scarce
can creep,

And, with the wounded and the dying, fall
Into the ranks, which like the torrents sweep
Towards the town, with a tumultuous roar,

Driving the foe, as tempests lash the scud,
And, pressing onwards, burst the gates, and o'er
The ramparts surge ; the passages run blood ;
The flames burst out ; aghast the Trojans flee :
And on the morrow Troy has ceased to be.

Ten weary years have sped since thou thy hearth

And home and wife and little ones hast seen ;
And now, O king ! After an age of dearth,

Of toil and trial, long drawn out and lean,
From the far east thou risest like the sun ;

And sorrow's night before thy coming flies.

High in our sky, until thy course is run,

Be thou the very light unto our eyes ;
Our shield, our sword : protect us by thy might :
A tower by day, a flame of fire by night.

[*During the progress of the Ode, AGAMEMNON stands unmoved in his chariot. At the end, there are more cheers, and at last AGAMEMNON motions them to be silent.*

HER. Silence !

AGA. Brave Argives, who for half a score of years
Have stemmed the tide of battle without murmur,
Rejoice with me to-day that Troy has fallen,

[*Cheers.*

That Helen is restored to Menelaus ; [*Cheers.*

And let us also mourn the gallant dead—

Ajax, Patroclus, and Achilles dire—

But noble blood is never shed in vain :

Falling in fight against a common foe,

They drew our bickering bands together, bound

By ties of blood ; till Greece to-day is welded

In one great commonwealth beneath our rule ;

And Argos grown the head and heart of Hellas.

You've paid a passing price ; but in return

You gain the priceless treasure of the East.

Hereafter dusky slaves shall delve for you,

And Asia's gold shall flow into your tills.

What fairer fortune could befall you ? Friends !

My tongue is tired; my deeds must speak the rest;
And you shall judge if I have done what's best.

[*The crowd cheer.* AGAMEMNON *is about to dismount, when* CLYTÆMNESTRA *stops him by a gesture.*

CLY. [*Addressing the maidens.*]

Now spread the sacred purple o'er the ground !
Let not the feet that trod the necks of kings
Touch common clay. Hath he not overcome
Poseidon, Cypris? Bow the stubborn knee,
For surely he must be himself a god.

[*They fall on their faces before him.*
 AGAMEMNON *steps down from his chariot, and raises* CLYTÆMNESTRA.

AGA. Time has dealt tenderly with my true queen ;
You are the same, not older by a wrinkle
Than when we parted.

CLY. Would your words were true!

[She puts her hand on ORESTES' shoulder.

But here is one whom time indeed hath changed
Beyond all reckoning.

AG. Orestes!

ORES. Father! [*They embrace.*]

AGA. [*Holding him at arms' length.*]

Why, let me see. How old is he?

ORES.

Eighteen.

AGA. A full-fledged man! built of the very
stuff

Heroes are hammered out of. Heaven be praised
For giving Agamemnon such a son
To sit upon his throne when he is gone.

ORES. And you have changed. You were not
grey before.

AGA. No; black as night.

[*Sighs, and knits his brows.*]

ORES.

You did not wear a frown.

AGA. Helmet and crown will crease the smoothest
brow.

ORES. But tell me, father, who is she that
rode

Beside you in the chariot?

AGA.

Cassandra,

Daughter of aged Priam, King of Troy—

The spoils of war. She fell to me by lot.

ORES. She's beautiful. What will you do with
her?

CLY. [*Sarcastically.*] The king will sacrifice her
to the god,

As a thank-offering for victory.

AGA. It is for me to choose the sacrifice.

CAS. Then let the king beware, for he and I
Will die together. [*The soldiers laugh.*]

AGA. [*Laughing incredulously.*] Guard her care-
fully.

CAS. Aye, guard yourself against the angry gods.
Put on your armour, grasp your sword and shield,
And try your strength against my Loxias.

AGA. [*Addressing THE QUEEN, and disregarding
CASSANDRA.*]

Come, take my hand, we must not linger here :
For it is meet that we should sacrifice
To Hera and the gods who fought for Greece.

[*The procession moves on.*]

CAS. Behold the god who fled from Hector's
spear.

ORES. [*To AGAMEMNON.*] I fear that fury : she
will do you harm.

CLY. What could a woman do against such
might ?

CAS. He walks as though he were a god. Great powers !

Punish this pride, and spoil the spoiler. Loxias !
Avenge my wrongs on this Prometheus.

[CLYTÆMNESTRA crowns AGAMEMNON
with a garland ; the maidens kiss the
hem of his garment ; the crowd cheer.

CAS. [*Pointing to AGAMEMNON.*]

Behold the sacrifice ! Crown him with garlands.
Lead him to the altar. Cry aloud,
And plunge the blade into the victim's breast.

THE SOLDIERS. [*Jeeringly.*] An oracle !

[*The procession files into the Palace. The crowd make a rush at CLYTÆMNESTRA, but the SOLDIERS keep them off, laughing good-humouredly at her.*

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*The Great Hall at the King's Palace. The King is seated on his throne, the Queen beside him; behind him stands CASSANDRA; on the steps of the throne sit ORESTES, CHRYSOTHEMIS, HERMIONE. The rest of the Court are standing.*

HERALD. An embassy from Corinth waits without.

AGA. Admit them.

CLY. What can the message be they bear?
Some fresh distinction—

ORES. Or some greater quest
To which they call you—take me with you, father!

AGA. Yes, my son, if I am called by duty;
But I have earned my rest, and long to live
The twilight of my life with those I love.

Enter CORINTHIAN EMBASSY.

[They prostrate themselves.]

ENVOY. Most puissant king! the prince of Corinth
lays

His homage humbly at your Highness' feet,
Praying you will avow him as your vassal,
Instant at your behest to fight your battles
Loyally ; and, as a set-off, stipulates
That you shall swear to fend him from his foes.

AGA. 'Twould ill beseem the leader of the Greeks
Should he refuse the fealty you proffer.
Tell Corinth I will be his over-king,
Upon condition that he entertain
No embassy without my sufferance,
And wage no war without my warranty.

[THE EMBASSY *bow and retire.*

CLY. [*To the king.*] You will not intermeddle in
their quarrels ?

AGA. The driver and his horses are but one :
Corinth is harnessed to my chariot ;
And so my foes are hers, and hers are mine.

CLY. We have enough already on our hands.

AGA. My hands are strong enough to hold them
all :

Athens and Sparta, Thebes and Megara.

[*Puts his hands out as if he were driving
a chariot.*

CLY. No man could drive so mutinous a team.

AGA. I'll do it yet. But why do I waste words?

[Turns away angrily.]

CLY. How openly he flouts me! While he lives
I shall be powerless as a chamber-wench.

*Enter SECOND EMBASSY. They approach the KING,
and prostrate themselves.*

SECOND ENVOY. Great king of kings! we come
from Ilium,

Commanded to commit into your charge
These diadems, which yesterday did grace
The brows of Priam and Queen Hecuba.
Henceforth by right of conquest they are yours.

AGA. *[Taking the crown of PRIAM, and setting it
on his head.]*

Here let it rest, a record of this war;
That when men see it they may fear a foe
Who never flinches till the fight is won.

CLY. Give me the crown of Hecuba.

AGA. Not so.

A coronet might cheat the crazy crowd,
Making them fancy you their ruler still.

They 've yet to learn that I am despot here.

[*Hands the crown to CASSANDRA.*

CAS. Whose crown is this? [*Takes it absently.*
[*With a cry.*] My mother's! Where is she?

ENVOY. Princess! the queen is dead of broken
heart,

At loss of all that made her sad life sweet—
Husband and children, home and liberty.

CAS. Dead, not dishonoured! Better, better so.
Why do I live when I could end my life
So easily? O Loxias! Let me go.

[*She draws her dagger.*

AGA. [*Holds her hand.*] Nay, play with this
instead. [*Touches the crown.*

CAS. [*Eagerly.*] You'll give it me.
[*They converse.*

CLY. My purpose staggered, now again 'tis fixed.
I'll roll the stone, and care not what it wrecks.

[*Exit.*

CAS. [*Holding up the crown, and addressing it as
if it were a living person.*

How beautiful she is! The golden crown
Inlaid among her silver locks; her eyes

Shimmering through the trembling tears outshine
These sapphires set in sparkling diamonds.

What ails you, mother? Do not wring your hands,
For you have other sons. What do you say?

I cannot hear your voice, 'tis like a ghost's.

A ghost!— [*She puts her hand to her head.*

I had forgotten. She is dead.

They all are dead; but I am left alive,

A slave in a strange land, alone, alone.

[*She retires up and weeps; while she is
delivering this speech* AGAMEMNON
and ORESTES converse apart.

ORES. 'Tis wonderful!

AGA. Presently embassies

From Thebes and Sparta, Athens, Megara,

Arrive, making submission to my rule.

ORES. You will, indeed, be King of all the land,
From north to south, from east to western sea.

AGA. Have I not earned my crown, spilling my
blood,

Spending my substance, sleeping on the sod
Beneath the winter-rain, and munching crusts,
When I might easily have slept on silk,

And fed on flesh, washing it down with wine?

[*Turns to* COURTIERS.

The Court is over. Later on we'll meet

Our loyal subjects at the festival.

[*Exeunt* COURTIERS, *leaving the family party on the stage.*

[*To* ORESTES.] And what have you been doing all
this while [He touches the throne.

To fit yourself to sit upon this seat?

ORES. Nothing. [Looks down.

AGA. [*To* MELEANDER.] How go his studies?

MEL. Judge for yourself.

AGA. And have you learnt to stalk the keen-eyed
stag,

To wield the sword, and hurl the heavy spear?

ORES. Judge for yourself.

[*Imitates* MELEANDER.

AGA. [*To* MELEANDER.] We'll put him to the
proof.

ORES. May I not fight a bout with Meleander?

AGA. Yes, yes.

ORES. [*Rubs his hands.*] I'll make him ache in every limb.

[MELEANDER *takes down the swords and shields from the wall.*

MEL. I'd rather teach philosophy.

AGA. Why so?

MEL. It breaks no bones. Come, ready! On your guard!

[*They fence: ORESTES pinks him.*

AGA. A point!

[ORESTES *pinks him again.* MELEANDER *cries out.*]

Another point! Now, Meleander!

[ORESTES *pinks him again.* MELEANDER *throws down his arms, and walks about rubbing his shoulder.* ORESTES *and AGAMEMNON laugh.*

AGA. [*To MELEANDER.*] Here, stand aside!
And let me feel how hard the youngster hits.

[*He takes up the sword and shield.*

Come! Are you ready? Stand upon your guard.

[*They fence: AGAMEMNON remains on the defensive.*

Now, shall I show you how to kill your foe?

ORES. Yes ; if you don't kill me.

AGA. The gods forbid ! [*Pinks him.*]

ORES. Again. [*A. pinks him.*] Slower ! slower !

Now, I see. [*He pinks AGAMEMNON.*]

AGA. Well done ! my boy, 'twas worthy of
Achilles. [*He embraces him.*]

What is there left in life that I could wish ?

A loving wife beside me, at my feet

An empire, and a son like Hercules.

[*ORESTES buckles on his sword again.*]

What sword is that you wear ? Who gave it you ?

[*ORESTES is about to speak, but is stopped
by a gesture from CHRYSOTHEMIS.*]

ORES. The queen !

AGA. [*Angrily.*] The queen ! My sword !

Well, let it pass. I was away so long

She had forgot it was my father's blade

With which he slew Thyestes' bestial brood.

And now 'tis time to robe me for the feast :

Come ! will you be my chamberlain to-day ?

ORES. I will be anything—your slave, your dog,
So long as I have leave to lodge with you.

[*Exeunt AGAMEMNON and ORESTES.*]

CHR. Oh ! what a man he is ! How proud I 'd
be

Of such a husband ! Would not you, sweet coz ?

HER. Some day Orestes will be such another.

Enter ELECTRA.

[She keeps in the background, trying to conceal herself.]

CAS. Come forth !

ELEC. *[Retreating.]* A Trojan woman.

CAS. Forth ! I say.

You wish to see the king ?

ELEC. *[Coming forward.]* How do you know ?

CAS. You seek to step between him and his fate.
What next ? You might as well essay to stop
The tide from rising, or the night from falling.

ELEC. You are his enemy, and strive to balk
me—

CAS. Why should I ? Is it not decreed that we
Should die together ?

ELEC. Then let me save you both.

CAS. We cannot fly from fate.

ELEC. Help me ! Have pity !

CAS. Pity! What pity had the Greeks for me?

ELEC. They spared your life.

CAS. My life! Inhuman wretches!

Why—why did they not put me out of pain?

[*Goes up.*]

ELEC. [*Turns to* CHRYSOTHEMIS.]

Will you not tell the king I wish to see him?

CHR. What for?

ELEC. To give him warning

CHR. Give him warning!

And fill his mind with groundless doubts and fears.

Take my advice—don't run your foolish head

Against the wall. But how did you escape?

[*ELECTRA turns to* HERMIONE.]

HER. [*Embracing* ELECTRA.]

Dear sister! Every woman, man, and child

Has seen the king, and he has smiled on all

Save you. Yes, I will gladly take your message.

ELEC. Tell him I crave his pardon for my fault,

And that this punishment of parting us

Passes endurance. Why should I, who long

To nestle in his loving arms, lie chained,

When criminals have been enlarged to swell
The cheers that greet the conqueror ?

HER.

I go.

ELEC. One instant, stay ! You have a dagger
with you.

Lend it to me, they took away my poniard.

HER. [*Gives ELECTRA her dagger.*]

You will not use it wildly ?

ELEC.

Trust me, no.

[*Exit HERMIONE.*

[*Spoken slowly, and with pauses between
each question.*

Am I too late ? Will he believe my tale ?

Would I believe a word against Orestes ?

Why was I kept away ? There's mischief
brewing.

What shall I tell him ? How shall I begin ?

Re-enter AGAMEMNON and ORESTES.

ELEC. Father !

[*She runs towards him ; he waves her back.*

AGA.

I left a daughter whom I prized,
Submissive to her parents and the gods ;

But in her place I find a mutineer,
Rebellious, undutiful.

ELEC. Believe me—

AGA. Nay,

Your mother says I might as well believe
A Cretan.

ELEC. That is false.

AGA. Irreverent child !

ELEC. Forgive me, Father ! for my temper's
quick,

And cannot brook an ill-deserved reproof.

[She clasps his knees.]

AGA. There ! Let me go !

ELEC. Not till you've clasped me close
To your dear heart.

AGA. *[Harshly.]* Release me ! do you hear ?

ELEC. Nay, do not look so fierce—you frighten
me.

*[AGAMEMNON having released himself,
walks away from her.]*

Yet I must speak, though you should strike me
dead.

You are in danger. Oh ! beware Ægisthus !

AGA. Ægisthus! You are dreaming! He's an outlaw.

ELEC. He left the palace as you entered it.

AGA. You level an impeachment at the queen.

ELEC. I seek to save your life.

AGA. This must be sifted.

[To LYSICLES.] When did you see Ægisthus last at Argos?

LYS. [*With a shrug.*] I cannot trust my memory.
I think

It must have been the year before the flood.

AGA. [*To MELEANDER.*]

When did you see Ægisthus last, and where?

Take time to answer me, and bear in mind

I bade you guard her honour as your life.

If you have winked at any treachery,

With which you should have made your king
acquaint,

You die the death.

[MELEANDER *pauses.*

Answer me!

MEL. [*Slowly.*]

Ages ago.

Enter GORGO.

AGA. [*To her.*] How long is't since Ægisthus
was at Argos?

GOR. [*Looks round. MELEANDER makes signs
to her.*

I'faith, not since your darling boy was weaned.

AGA. [*Turning fiercely on ELECTRA.*]

Liar! why did you fabricate this fable?

To sow dissension 'twixt the Queen and me?

I'll teach that double tongue to tell the truth.

ELEC. Will no one speak the truth but me?
Orestes!

AGA. Tell the truth, my boy; *you* need not fear.

ORES. [*Looking down, and speaking slowly.*]

I never saw the man.

ELEC. Orestes! Shame!

*Enter CLYTÆMNESTRA and armed attendants
hastily.*

AGA. [*To CLYTÆMNESTRA.*]

When did Ægisthus leave—

CLY.

Ægisthus ! Why ?

My lord, you frighten me. [*Observing* ELECTRA.]

Electra !

[To her attendants.]

Seize her !

[ELECTRA draws her dagger, but one of the attendants throws a net over her, and secures her.

ELEC. May I not say one word in my defence?

[*They gag her.*]

AGA. Take her away ; I'll deal with her to-morrow.

[Covers his face with his hands. ELECTRA is secured and led away. ORESTES is hardly able to restrain himself. CLYTÆMNESTRA goes over to him, and whispers to him.

ORES. [*To CLYTÆMNESTRA.*] I have forsworn
myself to shield your honour.

Nay, I will speak ; for I would rather risk
My father's wrath myself a thousand times
Than subject her to such disparagement.

CLY. [*To ORESTES.*] If he should learn the truth,
my life is lost.

Her fault is but a small one : do not fear.
His anger cools as quickly as it heats.
To-morrow morning all will be forgot.

ORES. Tell me, where has Ægisthus gone?

CLY. To Delphi.

AGA. [*Shudders.*] What makes me tremble like
a fluttering flag?

CLY. A touch of Trojan fever; you are worn:
Come, drink a stoup of wine, and rest a while.

AGA. [*Who looks pale and shaken.*] This is no
ague fit. A week ago

My flesh was shaken with this self-same fear—
Wrapped in my cloak, watching the wintry stars,
A sudden tremor seized the shuddering sail,
And stirred my hair and froze my creeping blood;
And then my heart stood still, for I beheld
Walking upon the wave Achilles' wraith.
Closer he came, swept up to the ship's side,
Mounted the deck, and gazed into my face
With dull lack-lustre eye-balls. "Speak!" I cried
In fear and trembling, for his lips were set.
"Surely, you bear some message from the dead."
He spoke; these were his words:—" 'Tis not for long
You wear my laurels, strip me of my spoils.
Before this winter moon hath run her course
Your life-blood shall be shed by one you love."

And then he vanished like the morning mist.

Again his warning words ring in my ear.

What can I do to turn aside this blow ?

CLY. You would not sacrifice another child ?

AGA. The gods forbid. [*Then, after a pause.*

What cause has she for hate ?

CLY. Her sister's death.

AGA. [*Sighing.*] I but obeyed the gods. [*Pauses.*

CLY. Despatch a messenger to Delphi straight,
To ask the god to guide us through this maze.

AGA. I'll go myself : he is a jealous god.

CLY. Nay, send Orestes. He is young and pure :
Just such a one as the immortals love.

ORES. Yes, let me go ! [*Aside.*] Ægisthus is at
Delphi.

AGA. [*Walking about.*] I would not care how
soon I met my death,

If once my work were done—my empire fixed.

But falling thus would rob me of my fame,

And stir the embers of the dying curse—

Heaping in ashes all the house of Atreus.

CLY. You'll let him go ?

ORES. [*Eagerly.*] Yes ; let me go at once ;

For from to-day I evermore will dread
To walk with you, lest by some cruel chance
I cause your death. It might be in the chase,
An ill-aimed shaft would pierce you to the heart.
Oh ! let me go ; for while I am away
I cannot harm you.

[AGAMEMNON *embraces him.*

AGA. Have no fear, my son.

ORES. Perhaps there's poison on my lips. Take
care !

[*He draws away from AGAMEMNON.*

My cloak may cling to you like Nessus' shirt.
Ah ! let me look. Perhaps the blow I struck
Has wounded.

[*He examines his father's arm.*

Not a scratch !

[*Then, with a sudden change of tone.*

You will not hurt her ?

AGA. Nay, but she must be kept in durance.
Come !

We'll go together to the harbour.

ORES. No.

We must remain apart. Good-bye, good-bye.

[*Walks up.*

CLY. [*Following him.*] You will not leave me thus, without one kiss.

[*She throws her arms round him.*

ORES. [*Releasing himself.*] I love your lips no longer. They are tainted.

CLY. Hush! Not so loud.

[*ORESTES rushes away.*

AGA. What have you ready for the sacrifice?

CLY. A Mycenæan ox, with garlands crowned.

[*AGAMEMNON takes her hand, and kisses it. They walk up.*

CAS. [*Aside.*] Which licks the hand that leads him to the altar.

CLY. [*Picking up the net which had been used to secure ELECTRA.*] What's this?

AGA. [*Examines it.*] A net to snare the forest-king.

Poor creature! When enmeshed within these folds,
A woman's hand could take the monarch's life.

[*CASSANDRA repeats AGAMEMNON'S words after him, and then goes up. Exeunt all but CASSANDRA, LYSICLES, and CLEOPHON.*

CLEO. How goes it in the city, Lysicles?

LYS. Famously! I have had it put about
That Troy has not been taken, that this crew
Are sole survivors of the Trojan war,
Which ended in defeat, not victory.

CLEO. And do they swallow it?

LYS. Most greedily.

Enter CITY ELDERS.

I greet you in the name of Agamemnon.

CITY ELDER. And in the city's name we greet
the king. [*They bow.*]

LYS. The king will sorrow that he was not here
To welcome you.

CITY ELDER. How fares his Majesty?

LYS. But poorly, for you know he's not a sailor.

CITY ELDER. [*Shaking his head solemnly.*]
Such qualms are sent to prove that kings are
mortal.

LYS. Ah! yes, alas! Some day the king must
die.

CITY ELDER. Surely his life is not in present
danger?

LYS. I am no doctor.

CITY ELDER. But——

LYS. [*With mock solemnity.*] Life is uncertain :

We're well to-day, and may be ill to-morrow ;
Alive this morning, dead before sundown.

CITY ELDER. If ill befell him, what would happen Argos ?

LYS. A riddle ! What is the answer ? Speak,
O Sphinx !

CITY ELDER. Nay, I am not a prophet.

LYS. So I thought.

Enter SOLDIERS OF AGAMEMNON, armed.

Not so much noise ! or you'll disturb the king.

SOLDIER. He likes a noise, and so do I. So, there !

LYS. You're drunk, you scoundrel !

SOLDIER. Well ! suppose I am.

If you'd been sober ten years at a stretch

You'd think it time to break your fast on wine.

LYS. Well, say no more. Go ! pile your arms
without ;

They are not wanted in the banquet-hall.

*[The soldiers go out, and return without
their arms.]*

[To CASSANDRA.]

Take off that diadem. It is the queen's.

CAS. She seeks another crown, not Hecuba's.

LYS. Peace! Slave!

SOLDIER. Leave her alone, she's daft,
And drones of death and daggers all the day.
Besides, the king has said that she shall speak.

CAS. There's no escape. The king must die.

LYS. Silence!

SOLDIER. No, let her rant. Of course the king
must die,
And so must all of us.

CAS. Spoiler of Troy!
You think yourself a god. You soon will know
That you are mortal. Aye, the time arrives
For both of us. Come! let me bare my breast,
That woos the ardent steel.

*[She tears open the breast of her dress,
and then stands for a few moments
gazing in the direction of AGAMEM-
NON'S room.]*

He casts aside
His coat of mail, and drops his trusty sword.
She takes a goblet, fills it full with wine.
He takes it from her hand, and drains the bowl,
And lays him down to rest. *[Pauses.]* See how
his lids

Already droop, half closed ; his limbs relax ;
She wraps a robe around him, croons a stave
To soothe the slumberer ; then rises soft,
Seizes a twisted net, and in its toils
Makes fast the drowsing victim to the altar.

[*Pauses.*

All is made ready for the sacrifice.
The axe is raised : now through the yielding air
The swift steel flashes in its lightning sweep.

AGA. Help ! I am slain.

SOLDIER. What voice is that ?

CAS. The king's.

SOLDIER. He is in danger. To the rescue ! Quick !

[*The SOLDIERS rush to the room where
they left their arms, and find it locked.*

There's treachery afoot. We have been duped.

No matter ; with our naked fists we'll beat

The murderer to death.

[*They strive to open the door of the
king's room, but fail.*

CITY ELDER. [*After walking up and down help-
lessly.*] Let's rouse the city.

[*The ELDERS make for the entrance-door
helter-skelter, but find it barred.*

We are betrayed. Let someone tell the queen
That Agamemnon's slain.

Enter CLYTÆMNESTRA.

CITY ELDER. The king is slain.

CLY. Why did you not prevent it?

SOLDIER. We were barred.

But lead us on, and we will slay his foe.

CLY. If you would slay his foe, then strike at me.
'Twas I who killed him. Go, and see my work.

*[They run into the bedroom, and bring
in the body in a sheet.]*

An hour ago he thought himself a god,
And now he's carrion. Have I done it well?

SOLDIER. The Trojan woman told the truth.

See here :

The hunter's net ; and there the blood-stained axe
With which the deed was done : while we, like fools,
Stood gaping by. Now, with the self-same blade
I will avenge him. *[Raises axe to strike.]*

CLY. Hear me before you strike.

CITY ELDER. Yes, hear the woman, for the law
requires

That none should suffer death without a trial.

CLY. Attend ! And you shall judge between us
two.

He was my husband, father of my children ;
But, driven by the curse upon his house,
He slew my child——

CITY ELDER. Nay, nay ! you wrong him there ;
He sacrificed your child to save the State.
'Twas not for that stale injury you took
His life ; some sharper spur has driven you on.

CLY. I don't gainsay it. Yes, the man was
false——

False to his children, false to his wife.
At Ilium Briseis shared his bed ;
And now he brings this Trojan baggage back
To Argos as his mistress. Look at her !
The crown of Hecuba upon her head.
Had I not struck he would have strangled me,
And bred up Trojan brats to govern Greece.
'Twas fated he should suffer for his crimes.
I 'm but the dagger in the grasp of fate.

CITY ELDER. What is your verdict ?

SOLDIER. Guilty !

CITY ELDER. What punishment ?

SOLDIER. Death by the axe with which she slew
the king.

[*Raises axe.* LYSICLES *strikes it up.*

LYSICLES. How hard it is to reckon friends
from foes !

[*Points to the dead body.*

What have you gained these ten years by his rule ?
Has he not sweated you like common slaves ?
While all the wealth you won he swallowed up ;
And in return what has he brought you back ?
A Trojan slave, to be his lady-love.
Where is the plunder promised you from Troy ?
A brace of crowns : one for his paramour.
Where are the thralls to till the Argive fields ?

[*He points to them.*

Here ! If he 'd lived, you would have been his slaves ;
For conquerors are tyrants, one and all.
See what a lot your queen has saved you from.
And shall she suffer ?

CAS. Not till her time arrives.

CLY. I had forgot.

[*She stabs CASSANDRA.*] Take that, and that, and
that.

He wants a Trojan slave to wait on him.

CAS. You've set me free at last. Oh! Loxias,
Receive me dying in your loving arms.

[*Dies.*

[*The SOLDIER again raises the axe to strike
CLYTÆMNESTRA, but at that moment
ÆGISTHUS and his armed followers
rush on. ÆGISTHUS takes CLYTÆM-
NESTRA'S hand.*

LYS. Long live Ægisthus! Hail Ægisthus king!

[*ÆGISTHUS' followers cheer.*

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

SCENE.—*The interior of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. On a tripod sits the PYTHIA (or priestess) of the god. Smoke issues from the ground, so as partially to conceal the PYTHIA. Two ATTENDANTS are moving about, one scattering water from a golden ewer, the other sweeping the floor with myrtle boughs.*

FIRST ATTENDANT. Ours is a happy lot, here
in the cool,
Free from the care and turmoil of the crowd,
Beneath the aegis of the guardian god.

SECOND ATTENDANT. This peace is perfect joy :
I pray my hours
May ever pass in this unruffled calm.

FIRST ATT. The future has no fear for us, the past
No vain regret. The first fruits of the earth,
The earliest pressings of the grapes, are ours.

SECOND ATT. [*Pointing to the PYTHIA.*] ‡
The Pythia is waking from her trance,
Mayhap the god will visit her to-day ;

The tell-tale blood flushes her pallid face,
Like the warm glow upon Aurora's cheek
When, waking from her sleep, she greets the sun.
And now her eyes inflame with ecstasy ;
Her form grows greater as her spirit soars
To greet the god descending to his shrine.
Her bosom heaves as though her beating heart
Would burst its bonds and leap to meet her lord.
The quick lips quiver. Now she throws her arm
Around the unseen form. She is possessed.

PYTHIA. The god is in his Temple ; on your
knees !

[*The ATTENDANTS prostrate themselves.
Distant music ; A CHORUS of invis-
ible singers sing the following chorus.*

Light of the world ! to whose far-flashing face
We dare not raise our eyes, lest it should blind
Our feeble sight, before whose glowing grace
The boisterous billows, and the rough north wind
Sink silent, while the goddess of the Night,
And all her satellites from near and far,
In homage to their sovereign hide their light,
As they behold the glory of thy car

Harnessed to flying steeds which never tire,

But ever day by day and year by year

Speed onward to the music of thy lyre

Which banishes all weariness. Oh ! hear

Our prayer, thou lord of Heaven and god of day

Be merciful ! turn not thy face away !

Come, flaming Phœbus ! with thy burning breath

Suck up the sickly mists, which like a pall

Lie on the plains, breeding decay and death.

Ye filmy fogs, which on the ocean fall,

Obscuring from the sailor's searching eyes

The beacons and the stars which are his guide,

Before the god's red spear in tumult rise,

And take your flight. Ye wood-birds, opening
wide

Your mellow throats, with myriad voices raise

Your morning madrigal. Ye bright-eyed flowers,

Open your budding lips in silent praise

Of our great god, who chased the gloomy powers

That brooded erst o'er land and sea and sky.

Hide not thy glory, Loxias, or we die.

Enter ORESTES, ushered in by an attendant.

PYTHIA. All hail ! Orestes, King of Argolis !

ORES. [*In alarm.*] The king still lives !

ATTENDANT. [*Bowing low.*] Youth is omniscient,

And does not need to kneel to Loxias.

ORES. [*Humbly.*] Nay, I have come to ask great Loxias' aid.

ATT. 'Tis well, my lord : the hour is opportune.

The god is even now within his shrine.

ORES. [*Addressing the PYTHIA.*]

Most reverend priestess of the mighty god !

I come from Argos, sent by Agamemnon,

To seek an oracle.

PYTHIA. Speak on, my son ;

The God attends.

ORES. Achilles' shade declares :—

The king must die, struck down by one most dear—

What can we do to save him from this fate ?

[*A sound of distant music is heard ; a light plays on the smoke.*]

ATT. [*Drawing ORESTES' attention to it.*]

A vision, sent by the god to answer you.

[ORESTES turns and sees a vision of AGAMEMNON'S room. AGAMEMNON and CLYTÆMNESTRA enter it. ORESTES is about to address them, but is stopped by the Attendant. The figures rehearse the murder scene in dumbshow; ORESTES exhibiting agitation as it proceeds, until, when CLYTÆMNESTRA seizes the axe, unable to control himself, he cries out.

ORES. Stop ! Your promise ! Spare him, mother !

[*The axe falls.*] Help ! [*He rushes forward ; the axe falls a second time, and AGAMEMNON expires.*

Too late ! too late ! Slain by the hand he loved.

[ÆGISTHUS' figure appears beside CLYTÆMNESTRA. ORESTES draws his sword, takes a few steps forward, staggers, and then falls in a faint. The music ceases suddenly, and the vision vanishes. The Attendants retire and leave the Temple apparently deserted, except for the PYTHIA, who remains seated on her tripod with closed eyes. After a short space the music strikes up again, and the invisible chorus sing.

CHORUS. Oh ! mighty monarch of the sky, without
Whose lustrous lamp we might for ever dwell
In Stygian darkness, stumbling round about,
Hither and thither, through life's little spell,
Like ghosts in Acheron ; to thee, of right,
The meed for saving us, thy slaves, belongs,
From the grim prison-house of ebon night.
Wherefore we never weary chanting songs
Of praise to him who banishes our grief ;
The foe of crime, impurity, deceit,
Of midnight murder, and the stealthy thief ;
Who trod the Titans underneath his feet ;
At whose dread name the powers of darkness pale.
Be thou our succour, and we shall not fail.

Enter LYSICLES *and* PLEISTHENES.

[A flash of lightning ; music stops suddenly.]

PLEIS. Let us go back ! See ! The god is angry.

LYS. *[Advances boldly.]* 'Tis but a juggling trick
to cheat our fancies.

These priests are versed in every subtle art
Which can deceive our unsuspecting senses,
Or bind our rebel spirits captive. Voices

Reverberating through this sombre void
Sound more than mortal ; and this aisle immense
Seems ten times vaster in the sunless gloom,
Made blacker by these blinding clouds of smoke
Which burst up from the bowels of the earth.
In yon eclipse imagination riots,
And conjures up the spirits of the dead.

[Beckons Attendant, who appears at this moment.]

Here ! take this gem, and help us to an audience.

[Hands Attendant a jewel.]

ATT. Is this an offering ?

LYS. Call it what you will.

ATT. Beware ! beware ! The god may strike
you dead.

LYS. *[Showing more jewels.]* See what we've
brought to turn away his rage.

ATT. These ill-got gains will not assuage his
wrath.

PLEIS. Nay, say not so. Take all that we have got.

ATT. Empty your wallets out before the shrine,
That he may gauge the measure of your guilt.

[They empty their wallets.]

PYTHIA. 'Tis not enough.

PLEIS. Say how much more you want.

PYTHIA. Not all the diamonds from distant Ind,
Nor every ounce of gold from Plutus' store,
Nor every pearl the gasping diver drags,
At danger of his life, from ocean depths,
Will move the gods to budge from their resolve.

[A flash of lightning.]

ATT. Away! before the god destroys you both,
For daring to approach his holy shrine.

*[LYSICLES and PLEISTHENES retreat;
the PYTHIA turns away her head.]*

LYS. We're tricked; they've stripped us bare,
and in return
They've given us naught but insult.

PLEIS. Ask it back!

LYS. Her face is turned away. We'll take it
back.

[They move towards the shrine.]

PLEIS. *[Pointing to ORESTES, and raising a warning hand.]* Look! *[They approach ORESTES and recognize him.]* Orestes!

LYS. Nay, after all, the god is good to us.

PLEIS. [*Looking round.*]

The coast is clear. [*Draws his dagger.*]

LYS. Gently!

PLEIS. Where shall I strike?

LYS. Between the shoulder-blades.

[PLEISTHENES *raises the dagger to strike, but at that moment PYLADES rushes forward and stabs PLEISTHENES, who falls mortally wounded; the Attendants appear.*]

PYL. [*Turning him over.*] Whom have we here?
Ægisthus' spawn! [*Gives the body a push with his foot.*] Traitor! Lie there!

[*He stoops over ORESTES.*]

LYS. Ah! well! poor lad. I cannot save him now:
So, each man for himself. [*He pockets the jewels.*]
[*Exit.*]

PYL. [*Recognizing his friend.*] Orestes! Death!
His heart is still—he does not breathe; his limbs
Are lax. Am I too late to save your life,
My brother, second self, my comrade, king?

ORACLE. What means this rude irreverent uproar,
Where solemn silence evermore should reign?

ATT. Blood has been shed, but not in sacrifice.

PYL. The only way to parry was to strike.

[PLEISTHENES *revives*. PYLADES
addressing him.

You dare not lie with your last gasp. Confess !

Here, in the holy temple of the god

Who searches hearts, confess your coward crime !

PLEIS. The god knows everything, so why deny ?

Go, tell my father all. [*Pauses.*] I cannot see.

Say that I did my best to execute

His orders—closer ! Your ear. I'm sinking fast—

How could I gain against the god ? I faint—

And if he's bent to found a dynasty,

Let him make haste, and get another son,

For I am spent. [*Dies.*

[*They carry away PLEISTHENES' body.*

ORES. [*Reviving.*] Sweet mother.

PYL. Are you hurt ?

ORES. My Pylades !

Where am I ? [*Looks about, shudders.*] Now it
all comes back to me.

I dreamt, oh ! such a dream. [*Covers his face.*

PYL. Will you not tell it ?

ORES. I dreamt my mother struck my father
dead.

PYL. It was no dream. I saw it, too.

ORES. You saw it!

[*Looks round wildly.*]

Where are we, then?

PYL. At Delphi.

ORES. How could we see?

PYL. It was a vision sent us by the god.

ORES. You don't believe that——

PYL. Nay; I dare not doubt.

ORES. Who dares to call my mother murderess?

PYTHIA. The god whose eye sees all——

ORES. The god! If so,

She's false—falser than any ruttish beast.

She swore she would be loyal to the king——

PYL. [*Interrupting.*] Aye! And she swore
Ægisthus was at Delphi.

PYTHIA. He rests at Argos in your father's
bed.

ORES. Oh! put a bridle on my tongue, for fear
I should say something in my passion's heat
To stir the anger of the god. [*Pauses.*] She swore

Electra should not suffer. [*Gives a cry.*]

[*Turns to go.*] Why do we wait ?

She will be next to die. Come, come ! Away !

Our errand is performed. We must not lag,

Or else we shall be late to rescue her.

PYTHIA. Ask guidance of the god before you
go.

ORES. [*Turns back reluctantly.*] The god has
told me all I feared to know.

PYTHIA. But not what you should do.

ORES. [*Much perturbed.*] Ah ! tell me, quick !

PYTHIA. Down on your knees, and ask the god
himself.

ORES. I know not what to say.

PYTHIA. Then breathe the words
That well up from your heart.

ORES. [*Kneels.*] Apollo, Lord !
Have pity on my youth. Espouse my cause ;
Or, if our house be hateful in thy sight,
Then let me die, and close this cruel curse
Which goads us on resistlessly to crime.

PYTHIA. The god has pity ; you shall expiate
The curse, and turn the Heaven's hate to love.

ORES. O welcome words ! Tell me, what shall
I do ?

I'll rear a temple to the god, more grand
Than ever graced the sacred groves of Greece.
Nay, do not spare, but speak. Set me the task,
However hard it be ; though I am weak,
The god will give me strength like Hercules :
I'll brave a lion with my naked hands.

PYTHIA. It will not strain your sinews ; but the
task
Will stretch your quivering heart-strings till they
snap.

ORES. I'll do what I am bidden by the god.

PYTHIA. Stiffen your spirit, steel your gentle
soul,
Avenge your sire, and smite his murderess.

ORES. [*Gives a cry.*] The heavens would never
smile on me again.

PYTHIA. Have you come hither, boy, to teach
the god ?

ORES. No, no ; she shall be doomed as she
deserves.

I'll stab Ægisthus : that will pierce her heart.

I'll take her crown ; she'd liefer lose her life.
I'll banish her ; but do not bid me kill.
She gave me birth ; she nursed and tended me,
And loved me. She was brave and beautiful,
And blameless, too, until she was betrayed.
He filched her virtue with his drugs and charms.
Oh ! spare her. Let her live. If she must die,
Set someone else the task, and not her son.
My heart rebels. If I should raise my hand
To strike my mother, whom I should defend,
'Twould drop down palsied at my side. No, no.
Here let me die instead.

PYTHIA.

Pray to the god !

ORES. My lips refuse to move.

ORACLE.

Unhappy wretch !

If you reject the hand the gods outstretch,
Driv'n by Thyestes' curse, the sport of fate,
Pursued by Heaven's unalterable hate——

ORES. Nay, let me die while I am innocent.

PYTHIA. Your father's furies hounding at your
heel,

Abhorred by all, an outcast, you will steal
Through slimy caverns, creeping out at dusk

To fill your belly with the root and husk ;
Until a loathsome leprosy at last
Shall clutch you in its claws, and hold you fast.

ORES. [*To PYLADES.*] Save me, save me !

[*He staggers. PYLADES supports him.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT V.

SCENE.—*The same as ACT I. In the portico of the Palace are placed two thrones.*

Enter ARCAS *and* MELEANDER.

ARCAS. [*Speaking low.*] The tyrant has no stomach to engage

His foes, so strikes his countrymen instead.

MELEANDER. Our lives are not our own—

AR. Our goods are forfeited—

MEL. Our children sold as slaves, against the law.

[*Enter* LYSICLES *unobserved.*]

AR. Usurpers reap the crops that others sow—

MEL. And fleece a friend to satisfy a foe.

AR. And now we're helpless in this vulture's claws.

MEL. Aye, none may carry arms except his feather.

LYS. What mutiny is this you're muttering?

MEL. What brevet do you hold to challenge us?

LYS. [*Slapping his sword.*] This sword, the
fountain-head of every right.

It ill becomes a bard to tell his tale
With bated breath ; come, sing it, sir !
Forte, fortissimo !

MEL. I have a cold.

LYS. And may be colder. Will you walk with
me ?

MEL. Whither ?

LYS. To prison. I am told the rack
Restores a stammerer like sorcery.

MEL. And what is my offence ?

LYS. That is a question
I cannot answer till I make you speak.

MEL. [*To ARCAS.*] You hear ! I am attached
without a charge.

LYS. And have you too a cold and cannot chant ?
I have a famous recipe for throats :
One application cures infallibly.

[He imitates the action of strangling.]

Enter SOLDIERS.

LYS. Come ! will you walk ? [*bows*] or shall we
drive you there ?

AR. Pray, lead the way ; and we will follow you.

LYS. [*Laughing.*] Aye, to the death.

[*Exeunt* ARCAS, MELEANDER, LYSICLES,
and SOLDIERS.]

Enter ELECTRA, HERMIONE, and CHRYSOTHEMIS.

ELEC. See ! how they hale our friends untried
to prison.

HER. We have no champion left to fight for us.

CHRY. We must lay down our arms and sue for
peace.

ELEC. Yield to that villain !

CHRY. If you strive with him,
He'll stab you in the back.

ELEC. I will be first
And strike before he's ripe.

CHRY. Nay, you are wrong.
It is not women's work. The gods will punish.

ELEC. I never knew an evil-doer drowned,
Struck by a thunderbolt, or swallowed up
By earthquake. We are the weapons which they
wield ;
And we alone can call the reckoning.

HER. Nay, nay. I'll not believe Orestes dead.

ELEC. [*Shakes her head.*] Were he alive, he
would not let this wretch

Usurp his throne. No, he was swift to strike ;
And when he heard the king was done to death,
He hurried to our help, and he was trapped,
And buried like a dog.

CHRY. Wait till you're sure.

ELEC. Yes, till he's swollen up with arrogance,
And laughs at fate, and then I'll strike the blow.

[*They go up.*]

Enter CLYTÆMNESTRA in regal dress.

CLY. [*Approaching ELECTRA.*]

Where have you been ?

ELEC. At Agamemnon's grave.

CLY. Against my orders.

ELEC. I but do my duty.

CLY. Not to the living.

ELEC. Do yours to the dead.

CLY. I scorn to wrangle with a peevish girl.

ELEC. Then let me sacrifice.

ELEC.

You killed the king, and think to kill his fame.
The task is past your powers. However much
You strive to smother it, his name will live
Throughout the ages. If you would avert
His vengeance, go to his grave ; upon your knees
Appeal for pity ; then, perchance, he'll call
His furies off the scent.

I do not fear.

Were he alive I would repeat the blow
I dealt, and he deserved ; and if you dare
To throw a stone at me I may be tempted
To treat you as a traitor.

ELEC.

Take my life ;

And from my virgin blood armed men will spring.

CLY. I do not fear the dead.

Enter ÆGISTHUS. He comes down to

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

CLY. Said I not right that dead men have no friends?

And to attain their objects make pretence
Their wicked will is Heaven's high decree.
On those who dare defy their saucy nod
They call down curses, which the credulous
Conspire to bring about. What does he want ?

TIRESIAS. Beware !

ÆG. I told you so.

TIR. Beware ! Beware !

The stone you started rolling down the hill
Will crush you, if you do not change your course.

CLY. What man is this who dares to chide his
queen ?

TIR. Princes and queens are servants of the
god ;

And I his herald blazon his decrees.

CLY. [*With a low half-mocking bow.*]

Pardon !—I did not recognize your rank—
And give your mandate to your humble slave.

TIR. Attend, then, to the thunder-tongue of
Zeus :—

A king should be the sun of his dominions,
High over all men's heads, magnificent,
Too dazzling to regard with unveiled lids,

Yet ever in their ken ; regarding all
With candid, vigilant, far-seeing eye ;
Shining alike upon the rich and poor,
And sharing all his store of golden wealth ;
Slanting his beams in spring to cool their fire,
Lest they should scorch the swelling seeds and
shoots ;

And in the summer, though he dry the spring,
Giving it back in drops of healing dew :
Destroying only what deserves to die.

ÆG. Come ! to the point ! What do you want
from me ?

TIR. Restore what you have ravished, and
release

The innocent. If you've a thirst to kill,
Quench it upon the blood of miscreants.

ÆG. Such callow counsel never came from
heaven.

You dreamt it, or you did not read it right.
When Zeus has any precept for his kings,
Swift-wingèd Hermes is his messenger.

TIR. 'Tis waste of words to warn the arrogant,
Who, void of reason, scorn the deity.

[*Turns to* CLYTÆMNESTRA.] Yet, hear me now
disclose your destiny :—

From your own loins there leaps a basilisk,
Which, having drained its mother's breast, will
suck

Her blood. [*Turns to go.*]

HER. [*To* ELECTRA.] You hear? He lives! He
lives!

ELEC. Hush! hush!

ÆG. Stay, stay! and tell me more.

TIR. I but obey
The orders of the god. [*Exit.*]

ÆG. [*Perturbed.*] How well it fits my dream!

CLY. Have you forgot
So soon the words you spoke about these seers?—
Making pretence their will is Heaven's decree,
And cursing those who dare defy their nod—
You are the prophet!

ÆG. Nay; I am a fool. [*Pauses.*]
He's but a shallow schemer, after all;
And we'll not be his tools to do his work.
You've set me on my feet again. [*Pauses.*] But
yet

I leave her in your hands, and look away.
Let's speak of something else but death. The sun
Is in the south. It must be nigh on noon.

ÆG. The hour we fixed to parley with the envoys.
Say, shall we summon them ?

CLY. Yes, yes, do so.
'Twill drive away these furies which beset me.
[*She claps her hands.*]

Enter GORGO.

CLY. Who is in waiting ?

ÆG. Cleophon.

CLY. [*To GORGO.*] Bid him attend !
Have the Athenian envoys yet arrived ?

GORGO. They're all in waiting in the vestibule,
As sour and stiff as if they'd swallowed spears,
And gaped to spit them out.

CLY. [*Impatiently.*] Let them come in.

GORGO. [*Trotting off.*] She can't sit still a
moment ; she's pursued,
And we must run if we'd keep up with her.
[*Exit.*]

ÆG. Which of us shall be spokesman ?

CLY. Why not you ?

ÆG. Nay, women yield more gracefully than men.

*Enter COURTIERs, who take their places.
The King and Queen take their seats
on the two thrones in the portico, after
which the ATHENIAN ENVOYS are
introduced by CLEOPHON.*

ATHENIAN ENVOY. [*Who merely bows to each
in turn, but does not prostrate himself.*]

Thyestes' son, Ægisthus : Clytæmnestra—

Titular King and Queen of Argolis :

A month ago an embassy was sent,

Admitting Agamemnon as our lord ;

But you have shed his blood, and snatched his
throne ;

And we are come directed to declare

We owe allegiance only to the seed

Of Agamemnon.

CLY. We take no umbrage at your speech,
accepting

Your disavowal, counting it our gain :

For too much power becomes a crushing weight,

Which we would sooner shift to stronger backs.

EN. Such gentle counsels fit a woman's tongue,
And bid us hope that Athens may embrace,
In lieu of fighting, Argos. Fare you well ! [*Exit.*

THEBAN ENVOY. [*Who remains standing.*
We come from Thebes—the city of seven gates,
Bearing this message :—" If Orestes lives,
Him will we recognize as our arch-king ;
But should another dare assert that right,
We'll meet him sword to sword."

CLY. Nay, set your minds at rest ; 'tis not our aim
To claim a title conquest only gives ;
Or fight for phantom empire. Why should we
Turn willing allies into sullen subjects ?
Here ! take your liberty, and give us love,
And we shall both be gainers by th' exchange.

EN. We scarce expected so much statesmanship
From such fair lips.

CLY. Then there is peace between us.
 [*The Envoy bows and retires.*

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES, disguised as Envoys.
ORESTES bears a cinerary urn.

ORES. We come from Phocis, by our sovereign
sent,

Bearer of this sad burthen, which enshrouds
The ashes of the dead. *[He pauses.*

CLY. The dead ! Who ? who ?
[ORESTES remains silent.

Your silence tortures me.

ORES. Orestes.

ELEC. *[Rushing forward.]* Ah !

[She throws up her arms, and falls in a faint. ORESTES is at first about to raise her, but PYLADES motions to him, and he leaves her to HERMIONE and CHRYSOTHEMIS, who minister to her.]

CLY. My brave, brave boy, the fairest of fair
flowers !

Some god has plucked my blossom in full bloom ;
And I am left behind, a withered weed,
Which he will never gather to his breast.

[She weeps.

ÆG. *[Aside to CLYTÆMNESTRA.]*

The pain is great, but life is often saved
By cutting off a limb that mortifies.

[CLYTÆMNESTRA looks at him suspiciously, then repulses him, and approaches ORESTES.]

CLY. Who slew my son? Let him beware my sword.

ORES. 'Twas at the Pythian Games he lost his life;
Two chariots, interlocking, overturned:
And those behind, unable to control
Their savage stallions straining at the traces,
Drove furiously against the shattered wreck;
And in an instant reared a living wave—
A seething swirl of struggling horse and men,
Each dealing death in phrensied fight for life.
He and one other turned their teams aside
To right and left; and thundered to the goal
He never reached; for, swerving at the turn,
He struck the inner post; the axle snapped;
And in the dust crashed chariot and rider.
Frantic with fright, the horses broke away,
And proud Orestes, tangled in the reins,
Was dragged like Hector round and round the
course.

[*ELECTRA revives, and goes up with HERMIONE
and CHRYSOTHEMIS, weeping.*]

CLY. [*Clasping the urn to her heart.*]
Alas! and is this all that's left to me?

A handful of dry dust to take the place
Of his warm heart, so soft and full of sap ?

ORES. You loved him ?

CLY. Yes : if Heaven would give him back,
I'd barter all my kingdom for the boon.
But now I must be gone : I cannot rest [*Going up.*
Till I have poured libations to his dust :—
Honey and oil and wine and milk and tears.

ORES. [*Following her.*] There is a sacrifice might
please him more.

CLY. [*Reading his meaning, but speaking with
averted face.*]

Women or water cannot stand alone.

ORES. They need a wall to hedge them in, or else
They fall away.

CLY. In these rude times they need
A prop.

ORES. [*Aside.*] She felled the oak that held her up,
And now she hangs upon this poisonous yew.

CLY. [*Turning to him.*] My friend, accept this
gem as a reward
For the sad service you have rendered me.
Yet do not go ; for I have much to ask.

Await us here a while, till I have done
My duty to the dead. [*To ÆGISTHUS, upon whom
she now leans.*] Your arm! This loss
Of my own blood has robbed me of my strength.

[*Exeunt* CLYTÆMNESTRA, ÆGISTHUS,
CLEOPHON, COURTIER, ENVOYS, *leaving*
ORESTES, ELECTRA, HERMIONE,
CHRYSOTHEMIS, *on the stage.*]

ELEC. [*To HERMIONE.*]

Come, let us speak with him, that we may glean
Some straws of solace in our suffering.

[*They approach* ORESTES.]

ELEC. We are Orestes' sisters, this his bride,
Greedy to gather up and store each grain,
Each shred that's reminiscent of the dead,
To keep his memory green.

HER. Sent he no word—
No dying pledge of his undying love :
The ring that kissed his finger, or the brooch
That clasped his heart? They did not burn them all
Upon the pyre?

ORES. Not all. He was my bosom friend,
And on that fatal day, foreboding death,

Between two sighs, he faltered in my ear:

“Oh! Shall I ever see Mycenæ more?”

And then he placed this packet in my palm,
And cried:—“If I should fall, and lose my life,
These tokens bear to Argos to my sisters,
And to my loved Hermione this ring.” [*Gives them.*]

HER. [*Kissing it.*] Yes, yes, it is his ring. It
brings him back:

I see him now, as he was wont to stand,
His head thrown back, his fingers tightly clenched,
Resting upon one foot, the other bent,
As though he spurned the earth, and longed to
spring
Upon his heavenly flight.

ELEC.

Alas! he has flown.

[*Changing her tone.*]

He had a friend—one Pylades. Where's he?

ORES. He feared that you would cast the blame
on him.

ELEC. I do. He should have held my brother
back:

For he was but a lad, and for a day
Forgot his father's fate—alas the day!

I had two champions once ; now I have none.

ORES. What need have you of champions ?

ELEC. To avenge

My father's death, and to protect my honour.

ORES. Your honour ! How is it endangered ?

Say !

ELEC. He'd make me wed a churl—

ORES. If you refuse ?

ELEC. He'll sell me as a slave.

ORES. The miscreant !

ELEC. You read my thoughts.

ORES. [*Half aloud.*] If I could read the queen's—

ELEC. You trust her tears ?

ORES. I cannot but believe——

She shook with sobs.

ELEC. She wept at her misdeeds.

Women are so. They sin and weep, and weep

And sin again.

ORES. And does she sacrifice

At Agamemnon's tomb ?

ELEC. No, but to Hera,

That she may bear a son to *him*, to reign

At Argos in Orestes' place. [*Turns away.*]

ORES. [*Turning round suddenly as if addressed.*]

I hear!

[*Shows signs of terror, then whispers to PYLADES.*]

Methought I heard my father crying out:—

“Avenge my death!” Avenge his death on whom?

The furies! Now they urge me on again

As my faint resolution faltered. Oh!

I’m torn in two. Again the vision floats

Before my eyes [*pauses*]: this doubt will drive me mad.

Are dreams enough to prove a culprit’s guilt?

PYL. Her guilt! She gloried in it.

ORES. So they say.

But no man saw it; and, for aught we know,

Ægisthus was the murderer; and she,

To save his worthless life, assumed the blame.

PYL. Her dress was dripping with the dead man’s gore.

ORES. What easier than dabble in his blood?

PYL. Remember what the oracle foretold

If you hang back!

ORES. [*Covering his face with his hands.*]

I know, I know, I know.

[*They go up. ELECTRA and CHRYSOTHEMIS, who have been talking earnestly, come down.*]

CHR. I could not be mistaken ; they are bent
On putting you to death ; lest you should prove
The basilisk the seer foretold.

ELEC. When? When?

CHR. This very day.

ELEC. Ah! how can I escape?

[*Pauses.*] There is one way.

CHR. Will you not tell us then?

ELEC. It is a secret which must die with me.
But now my time is short ; and I must bid
Adieu to all before I take my flight. [*Goes apart.*
Good-bye, dear Argos—City of the Kings ;
And you, great golden sun, look once again
With glowing glance on me, and on my woe ;
Or ere I go to everlasting gloom.
Good-bye, green fields, blue sea, and bluer sky !
One moment more I listen to the shrill
Of birds, the bay of hounds, the lowing herd,
Before I pass into the silent land.

[*She turns to HERMIONE and CHRYSOTHEMIS.*
And you, my best beloved of all that's left

How shall I tear myself from your embrace?

HER. Let me go with you!

ELEC. You must stay behind
To pay the last sad duties to the dead.

HER. And then I'll follow you. Show me the
way.

[ELECTRA *raises the dagger to stab herself.*
ORESTES *stays her hand.*

ELEC. You stay my hand to offer me a victim
To him I hate. My curse——

ORES. [*Kisses her.*] There's good for ill.
[ELECTRA *is about to cry out; he places*
his hand over her lips.

Hush! Not a word. The dead has come to life.

ELEC. The dead! [*He takes off his disguise.*]

HER. [*Embracing him.*] My love! I know him
by his lips.

ELEC. Oh! let me give you back that kiss again.
[*Embraces him.*] One more; and yet one more.
Speak, speak again,
That I may hear the voice I thought was hushed.

ORES. Then let us sit; and I will tell you all.

ELEC. No, let me hold you still and weep awhile
Why did you stab our hearts with this sad tale?

ORES. That we might easier stab the murderer.

PYL. The murderers. Hush! They are here.

Forget

She is your mother. She forgot——

*Re-enter ÆGISTHUS and CLYTÆMNESTRA,
followed by CLEOPHON.*

ÆG. I'll ne'er believe in visions, or in seers :
Yet how was it the prologue to my dream
Came true in every part?

CLY. It prompted us——

ÆG. But now he's dust, the dread catastrophe
Cannot come true.

CLY. And yet you're ill at ease.
What is there left to fear?

ÆG. Only a phantom ;
For faction perishes without a head.

CLY. Then let there be a truce, for I am sick
Of these proscriptions. There is no one left
Whom they could muster round. Send to the jails,
And set your prisoners free.

ÆG. [*to CLEOPHON.*] Aye, and restore
What we have taken from them.

CLEO. This is folly !

CLY. Obey my word.

CLEO. Take mine you'll suffer for it.
[*Exit.*]

CLY. Is it not monstrous, though my boy is
dead.

My spirit mounts as if a heavy load
Which weighed it down were lifted suddenly?
Now we may sleep secure. But why that frown?

ÆG. Tiresias' words still echo in my ears—
[*Looks over at ELECTRA.*]

"From your own loins their leaps a basilisk."

CLY. You will not leave me one?

ÆG. [*Taking his seat on the throne.*] No, no;
not one.

We must dig deep to find a firm foundation,
If we would raise a house that shall endure.
Come! One more wrench, and from the very earth
We will root out the accursed stock of Atreus.

CLY. Do it yourself. I'll have no hand in it.
[*Exit.*]

ÆG. [*To ELECTRA.*]

Stand forward, princess! Know, you are accused
Of rank rebellion against our rule:
Stirring the citizens to mutiny.

By your allegiance, Cleophon, declare
The charges which you bring against this dame.

CLEO. I tax her with high treason. See ! This
tablet,

Stamped with her seal, and trusted to a slave,
To be delivered to the Prince Orestes.

ÆG. [*To ELECTRA.*] Do you admit this writing?

ELEC. Why waste words,

Disputing with a despot?

ÆG. You confess !

ELEC. If it is wrong to rid the earth of tyrants,
And to restore my brother to the throne
You robbed him of, I do confess my guilt.

ÆG. And sitting on that throne I here condemn
you.

Take her away, and cast her in a cave,
And close it up, and seal it with my seal.

[CLEOPHON *arrests* ELECTRA.]

ORES. Nay, not so fast. Shall I return and say
What I have seen ?

ÆG. I care not what you tell.

'Tis not an envoy's office to report

What sentences we pass on mutineers.

ORES. Have you forgot how Theseus, Prince of Athens,
Made war on Thebes to right a private wrong?
Shall we do less? I draw my sovereign's sword
To save the innocent. [*Draws his sword.*]

ÆG. Then you divest
Your person of the sanctity which clings
Around an envoy's person. [*To CLEOPHON.*] Strike
him down.

ORES. [*To CLEOPHON.*] Release her.

CLEO. [*Drawing his sword.*] Yes, with this.

[*Tries to stab her.* ORESTES strikes up
his sword, upon which CLEOPHON
attacks ORESTES; but ORESTES
presses him hard; whereupon ÆGIS-
THUS joins in the fray. PYLADES
comes to the rescue, and engages
CLEOPHON. ORESTES is left to deal
with ÆGISTHUS, whom he drives
back step by step.

Enter LYSICLES.

LYS. What have we here? Help! To the
rescue!

[*He falls on ORESTES; but at that*

moment PYLADES cuts down CLEOPHON, and, coming to ORESTES' assistance, draws off LYSICLES. In response to LYSICLES' cry, the Soldiers rush on; but at the same moment the released prisoners enter from the other side. ORESTES, unconscious of his danger, removes his disguise.

ORES. Traitor, before I send you down to hell,
Look once upon your executioner.

[The released prisoners, recognizing him, shout, "ORESTES!" and cling to the soldiers, whom they hold back.]

Re-enter CLYTÆMNESTRA.

CLY. Ægisthus! Save him! Cleophon!

CLEO. Too late. *[Dies.]*

CLY. *[As she rushes between the combatants.]*

If he must die, then let me die with him.

[ORESTES runs her through the body and then drops his sword.]

ÆG. Now is my time.

[He tries to stab ORESTES, but PYLADES is too quick for him, and stabs him. ÆGISTHUS staggers back.]

LYS. Aye. Your time has come, and mine. [*Dies.*

ÆG. [*Looking at CLYTÆMNESTRA.*] The dream!

[*Falls.*

CLY. [*Recognizing ORESTES.*] Orestes! [*Faints.*

ORES. Say but one word to save my sinking
soul,

And do not add another cruel curse.

PYL. The curse is expiated. You've obeyed
The oracle and killed——

ORES. She is not dead!

PYL. Then let me finish what you've left undone.

ORES. [*Holding him back.*] She breathes again.

[*Goes down on his knees besides her.*] Mother!

CLY. My little dragon!

We thought that we were stronger than the gods:

That we could sail against the stream of fate:

But we are caught by its resistless tide

And dashed upon its iron rocks, and wrecked.

Its waves close over us——[*pauses*] and as I
sink

To my last sleep, my dawning spirit wakes.

Already I can see beyond the shroud

Which separates the short life from the long

And robs us of the light, so that we live

In twilight dim where men can only see
 A little space in front. [*She puts her hand over her
 eyes as if dazzled.*] Before my gaze
 The future stretches out an endless plain. [*Pauses.*

ORES. Then tell us, now, before your voice is
 hushed,

What is in store for us, and for our race.

CLY. From Agamemnon's spear a towering tree
 Shall spring, beneath whose branches Argos' sons
 Shall rest. [*She stops exhausted.*]

Closer! Ægisthus! Where is he?

I cannot see, or hear his voice. Ægisthus!

PYL. The dead are deaf.

CLY. 'Tis well! we go together :
 I'll overtake him ere he reach the Styx,
 And hand in hand we'll tread the unknown shores,
 And side by side suffer our punishment. [*Dies.*

OMNES. Orestes! Our King!

[*They form a group behind CLYTÆMNE-*
TRA's body. HERMIONE, *R.* ORESTES,
R.C. ELECTRA, *L.C.* PYLADES, *L.*

FINIS.

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